

**Building a Local Christian Theology in the Context of Korean
Religious Pluralism: A Critical Analysis of the Theology of
Ryu Yŏngmo (1890-1981)**

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I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and constitutes the results of my research in the subject.

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July 2001

Abstract

The thesis examines the thought of the Korean theologian Ryu Yŏngmo, who committed his life to developing a local Korean interpretation of Christian faith that engaged openly with the religious pluralism that has defined Korean culture through many centuries. The contribution of Ryu Yŏngmo to the history of Christian theology in Korea has largely been neglected in critical scholarship. His theology is advocated by a small group of loyal disciples, but it has been ignored by the Korean Protestant churches which generally favour an exclusivist approach to the question of Christianity and religious pluralism. The thesis aims to remedy this oversight and to offer a critical analysis of Ryu Yŏngmo's thinking, steering a course between the apologetical acclaim of his disciples and the polemical resistance of mainline Christianity.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part traces the history of religious pluralism in Korea as the context into which Christianity was introduced by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The main argument of this part of the thesis is that religious pluralism is inherently part of Korean culture in which shamanism, Confucianism and Buddhism form interactive layers of society, with the result that Koreans integrate elements of these three religious traditions in their social and individual identity. Missionary Christianity from the West regarded this as syncretistic and introduced the concept of Christian exclusivism. The study of the life experience of Ryu Yŏngmo demonstrates his growing disaffection with the missionary Christianity of his early life, leading to his break with the institutional church and his struggle to build a local theology that enables Christianity to engage with the religious pluralism of Korea.

Part Two examines the theological ideas of Ryu Yŏngmo as expressed in the extensive diaries that he wrote over the last twenty years of his life. Much of this material is written in poetic style, often in the form of meditative notes. Systematic interpretation is facilitated by reference to notes of his public lectures that have been preserved by various of his disciples. These sources enable the main chapters of the thesis to focus on three central ideas in Ryu Yŏngmo's thought: his concept of God expressed in the term *Han'uhnim*; his understanding of Jesus and Christ as expressed in the term *Ŏl*; and his vision of Christian faith and living as 'returning to the One' as expressed in the term *Kwi-il*.

In its third part the thesis attempts a critical evaluation of Ryu Yŏngmo's thought in terms of constructing a local theology of religious pluralism which addresses Korean religious realities and adopts Korean methods of religious knowledge. A comparison of the ways in which Ryu Yŏngmo deals with religious pluralism, and those of John Hick, John B. Cobb and Paul F. Knitter in the West, demonstrates that Ryu Yŏngmo's theology, while being genuinely local, is potentially of significance for Christian theology in its global dimensions. The thesis concludes that dialogue between Korean and other local theologies can be of reciprocal enrichment, especially in facing the common challenge of re-thinking the Christian relationship with other religions.

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Ryu Yŏngmo's Intellectual and Spiritual Biography with Socio-political Context

Biography		Socio-political Context
1890(1) – 1904(14): Early Life in Confucian Society		
1777		Forming the Confucian-Christian Community
1792		Reported to Pope about establishment of Chosŏn Catholic Church
1884		Protestant Christianity introduced to Korea <i>Kapsin-chŏngbyŏn</i> occurred
1887		New Testament translated into Korean
1894		<i>Tonghak</i> Uprisings Sino-Japanese War in Korea
1895		Queen Min assassinated by Japanese
1890	13. 3. Ryu born in Seoul	
1895	Memorised <i>Ch'ŏnjamun</i> (a primer of Chinese characters)	
1896	Studied in <i>Sŏdang</i>	
1901	Entered <i>Suhadong sohakkyo</i> (primary school)	
1903-5	Studied the works of Mencius for three years	28. 10. YMCA established
1904		Russo-Japanese War in Korea
1905(15) – 1911(21): The Encounter with the West and Christianity		
1905		Concluded the protectorate treaty with Japan by force
1905(15)	Spring: Ryu started to attend <i>Yŏndong</i> Church by Kim Chŏngsik in YMCA Summer: Ryu studied Sino-Korean from a private teacher for three years Autumn: entered <i>Kyŏngsŏng-Hakdang</i> (private Japanese language institute)	
1907	Entered <i>Kyŏngsin</i> school	Korean Christian population to reach 200,000
1909	Taught at <i>Yangp'yŏng</i> school for one year	

1910(20)	<p>Worked in <i>Osan</i> school as a teacher</p> <p>7. 1. <i>Osan</i> school had a memorial ceremony for Leo Tolstoi</p> <p>Met Yŏ Chun and Sin Ch'aeho in <i>Osan</i> school</p>	<p>The Japanese annexation of Korea (1910-1945)</p> <p>Old Testament translated into Korean</p>
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1912(22) – 1922(32): Towards the Way of *Kkaedalŭm* (깨달음, Awakening)

1912(22)	<p>Quit attending churches</p> <p>Studied Leo Tolstoi and Uchimura Kanzo</p> <p>Young brother Yŏngmuk died</p> <p>Started to study Tao and Buddhist scriptures</p>	
1912. 9-	-1913. 6. Studied in Tokyo <i>Muli</i> school for entering university.	
1914	<p>Studied <i>Hwaŏm Kyŏng</i> (Flower Garland Scripture) from Buddhist monk</p> <p>Met Ch'oi Namsŏn</p>	
1915(25)	Ryu married to Kim Hyojŏng	
1918(28)	Started to count the days his life from his birthday	
1919	Ryu's father was one of forty eight representative members of independent movement 1 st march, 1919	<p>28. 2. Korean students in Japan proclaimed the independence declaration.</p> <p>Independent movement 1st march, 1919</p>
1921(31)	Worked in <i>Osan</i> school as the president for one year	

1923(33) – 1940(50): Consolidation of Ryu's Views on Religion

1928(38)	Ryu started to teach in YMCA until 1963	
1935(45)	Ryu moved to do farming in Kugi Ri	
1938	<p>Closing down of YMCA by Japanese</p> <p>Ryu's lecture were continuing underground</p>	
1939(49)	Wrote for <i>Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn</i>	

1941(51) – 1955(65): Putting His View of Religion into Practice

1941(51)	Started to eat one meal in a day and refrained from sexual relationship with his wife during his marriage onward (17. 2)	
1943(53)	Became friends with Yi Hyŏnpil of <i>Tonggwangwŏn</i>	
1945		15. 8. Liberation achieved from Japanese colonial power
1948		US set up a formal United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) Division of Korea August. Establishment of the Republic of Korea in the south September. Establishment of Democratic Republic of Korea in the north
1950		25. 6. Korean War started
1953		27. 7. Concluded a cease-fire agreement

1955(65) – 1981(91): Preparing for Death

1955(65)	Predicted the date of his death 26 th April, in 1956	
1956-61	Ryu's address book recorded in this period	
1959(69)	Translated <i>Noja</i> (Tao-te-ching) completely into Korean Translated a part of the Doctrine of Mean and <i>Panyasimkyŏng</i> (Parajna-paramitasutra)	
1960(70)	Chu Kyusik wrote down Ryu's lecture	19. 4. The April Revolution The Second Republic of Park Chung Hee (1960-1979)
1961(71)	Fell from roof	
1971(81)	Scolded his disciple Ham Sŏkhŏn	
1977(87)	Ryu left home in order to die on the street i	
1979		26. 10. President Park Chung Hee assassinated by Kim Chae Kyu
1980(90)	Did not recognise people whom he knew	
1981(91)	3. 2. Ryu died	The Fifth Republic of Chun Doo Hwan (1981-1988)

Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Ryu Yǒngmo's Intellectual and Spiritual Biography with Socio-political Context	v
Table of Contents	viii

Prolegomena	1
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Introduction	1
Local Theology	2
Ryu Yǒngmo as the Subject of This Study	6
The State of Current Scholarship	10
Research Hypotheses	13
Methods and Organisation of the Research	14
Sources	16
Review of Primary Sources	16
Review of Secondary Sources	21
Biographical Material on Ryu Yǒngmo	21
Materials which Explain Ryu's Thought	22
Scholarly Studies of Ryu Yǒngmo	23
Organisation of the Thesis	23

Part One: Korean Religious Pluralism as the Context of Korean Christianity and Ryu Yǒngmo

Chapter One: Religious Pluralism in Korea	25
Introduction	25

Korea's Cumulative Religious Tradition	27
<i>Mu</i> (무, 巫, Shamanism)	28
Buddhism	34
Confucianism	39
The Korean Experience of Religious Plurality	45
Conclusion	50
Chapter Two: The Introduction of Christianity in a Multi-Religious Context	52
Introduction	52
The Advent of Catholic Christianity	53
The Formation of the Confucian-Christian Community	54
The Transformation of the Confucian-Christian Community	59
The Introduction of Protestant Christianity	62
The Formation of Protestant Churches	62
The Characteristics of Early Protestantism in Korea	65
The Missionaries' Attitude to Korean Culture	69
The Polarities within Indigenous Korean Protestantism	71
Conservative Theology and Liberal Theology	71
The Polarity in Liberal Theology: Theology of Religion and <i>Minjung</i> Theology	74
Conclusion	79
Chapter Three: The Life of Ryu Yŏngmo (1890-1981)	81
Introduction	81
Early Life in Confucian Society (1890-1904)	82
The Encounter with the West and Christianity (1905-1911)	86
Towards the Way of <i>Kkaedalŭm</i> (깨달음, Awakening) (1912-1922)	89
Consolidation of Ryu's Views on Religion (1923-1940)	97
Putting His View of Religion into Practice (1941-1955)	102
Preparing for Death (1955-1981)	105
Conclusion	108

Part Two: Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology

Chapter Four: <i>Han'uhnim</i> (한웅님): Ryu Yŏngmo's Understanding of God	110
Introduction	110
<i>Han'uhnim</i> as the Name of God in Ryu's Thought	110
The Name of God in Korean Christianity	110
Ryu Yŏngmo and the Korean Language as the Vehicle for Local Theology	113
The Naming of God in Ryu's Diaries (<i>Tasŏk-ilji</i> , 다석일지)	116
<i>Hananim</i> (하나님) and <i>Han'uhnim</i> (한웅님)	117
<i>Han'uhnim</i>, Existence and Non-Existence	121
Ryu's Understanding of God as <i>Han'uhnim</i>	121
Existence and Non-Existence as the Nature of <i>Han'uhnim</i>	127
Harmony of <i>Hana</i> (Oneness)	132
Conclusion	136
Chapter Five: <i>Ŏl</i> (얼) as Christ: An Approach to Christology	138
Introduction	138
Understanding <i>Ŏl</i>	139
Defining <i>Ŏl</i>	140
Definition and Examples of <i>Ŏl</i>	140
<i>Ŏl</i> in Ryu's Writing	140
The Understanding of Jesus in Ryu's Writing	150
Building <i>Ŏl</i> Christology	157
Jesus as the Flesh Is Not Christ	158
Jesus Is Not God	159
<i>Ŏl</i> Is Christ	160

Jesus Is Not the Only Christ	162
Incarnation and Salvation	164
Conclusion	166
Chapter Six: Building a Theological Praxis: <i>Kwi-il</i> (귀일, 歸一, Returning to the One)	169
Introduction	169
<i>Kwi-il</i> as a Theological Framework	170
Defining <i>Kwi-il</i>	170
Ryu's Understanding of <i>Kwi-il</i>	175
Jesus in the Perspective of <i>Kwi-il</i>	178
God in the Perspective of <i>Kwi-il</i>	184
Faith in the Perspective of <i>Kwi-il</i>	187
Conclusion	189

Part Three: Ryu Yŏngmo and Contemporary Issues in Religious Pluralism

Chapter Seven: Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology in Relation to Contemporary Issues in Religious Pluralism	191
Introduction	191
A Preparation for Dialogue: John Hick, John B. Cobb and Paul F. Knitter	193
Dialogue 1: John Hick and Ryu Yŏngmo – God and <i>Han'uhnim</i>	195
Hick as an example of Theocentrism	195
Dialogue between Ryu and Hick	199
Dialogue 2: John B. Cobb and Ryu Yŏngmo – Christ and <i>Ŏl</i>	208
Christocentrism and Cobb	208
Dialogue between Ryu and Cobb	212
Dialogue 3: Paul F. Knitter and Ryu Yŏngmo	217
Soteriocentrism and Knitter	217
Dialogue between Ryu and Knitter	220

Conclusion	223
Chapter Eight: A Summary and Assessment of Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology	224
Introduction	224
Ryu Yŏngmo Lived the Experience of Religious Pluralism	225
Employing Korean Characters for Local Theology	226
Ryu Yŏngmo's Understanding of God as Existence and Non-Existence	230
Ryu's Understanding of the Relationship between Jesus and Christ	232
The Balance of Theory and Practice in Theology	234
The Significance of Ryu's Theology for Current Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism	236
Overcoming an Exclusive Attitude	236
An Integrated View of God	237
The Possibility of Metaphoric Language as Theological Language	238
Conclusion	240
Glossary	244
Selected Bibliography	249
Works in Western Languages	249
Works in East-Asian Languages	257

Prolegomena

A. Introduction

Christianity has a relatively recent history in Korea, Catholicism being introduced in the late eighteenth century, and Protestantism in the late nineteenth century. From the beginning Christianity was identified as a form of Western learning, and this was confirmed by the dominant role that Western Christian missionaries played in its propagation in Korea. The character of Korean Christianity was further problematised by the turbulence of Korean history itself, from the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). The ravages of the First and Second World Wars were followed by the post-Second World War division of Korea, initially between Russian and American military administrations, and subsequently confirmed through the establishment of the Republic of Korea in the south (August 1948) and the Democratic Republic of Korea in the north (September 1948). Caught in the vortex of such social and political chaos, it was beyond the ability of the Korean churches to develop or internalise a local Korean Christianity differentiated from the dominance of Western social and political influence. It is true that, from the time of the Japanese occupation, many individual Korean Christians played an important role in the struggle for national independence and were especially prominent among the leaders of the 1st March Independent Movement, when thousands took to the streets in a popular movement for national self-determination. Although this was an important step identifying Christianity with the *minjung*, the unsettled nature of these circumstances was not conducive to the task of building a full-scale subjective or a local theology.

In addition, it may be argued that the religious situation of Korea into which Christianity was introduced was more complicated and diverse than any other that Christianity encountered in its missionary expansion. In addition to the ancient traditions of Korean shamanism, Korean culture was structured around

Confucianism and Buddhism, each of which penetrated the other in a complex interaction of social co-existence. Religious pluralism is an inherent characteristic of Korean culture and of the religious experience of every Korean. Without a deep engagement with the plural religious traditions of Korea, it was impossible for Christianity to root itself in Korean cultural experience. This was something that the Western missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, found difficult, and in most cases impossible, to understand, far less engage with in a constructive manner. As a consequence, Korean Christians were given little encouragement to relate to the existing religious traditions of Korea in an attempt to develop local theology. Mainstream Korean Christianity therefore reflected the theological exclusivism of missionary Christianity, and opted for a Western religious orientation with a careless predisposition to rejecting Korea's own culture and religious experience.

Despite these obstacles, there have been recurrent attempts by individual Korean Christians to re-interpret Western Christianity in terms of the Korean plurality of religions. This thesis is concerned with one such individual, Ryu Yŏngmo (유영모, 柳永模, 1890-1981) who, it will be argued, represented a fascinating endeavour to re-interpret Christianity through constructive interaction with Korean religious pluralism. The primary aim of the thesis is to examine his life and thought as an example of building a local Christian theology in the context of Korean religious traditions.

B. Local Theology

Local theology, to borrow the term used by Robert Schreiter,¹ means a theology developed by Christians in a given locality for that locality. It is a theology that focuses on the interpretation of the gospel in dynamic interaction with the identity of a local people's identity, rather than a theology that requires the substitution of the

¹ See Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 2.

people's identity by a theology developed by other people in other contexts. Thus, in terms of methodology, local theology values the context in which theological reflection takes place, and seeks to recruit the cultural resources of the context in order to develop a contextual Christian theology. Many of the contexts in which Christianity is growing in the countries of the so-called South are defined by religious pluralism. This is emphatically the case with Korea. Kim Kwangsik, a Korean theologian, distinguishes two dimensions of religious pluralism in Korea. One recognises religious pluralism as a social reality and as an element of Korean nationalism as illustrated in the solidarity of Koreans of different religious affiliations in the 1st March Independent Movement of 1919. The other dimension is theological, which put more emphasis on the individual's faith and practice. Assessing these two dimensions, Kim argues that Koreans are generally better at managing social pluralism than they are in affirming pluralism in theological terms,² and this thesis undertakes a theological reflection on a local theology that has been developing in the Korean multi-religious context.

Several terms are currently used in contemporary missiological literature to refer to the task of developing local theology. For instance, 'indigenous theology', 'inculturation theology' and 'contextual theology' are widely employed, with the intention of differentiating local theology from theologies that claim to be, or are presumed to be, 'universal' or 'perennial'. The problem with these neologisms is that they generally seek to distinguish the phenomenon of non-Western theologies from the normative theologies of the West.³ The term 'local', as used in this thesis implies that there is no normative theology, for theology is always local in character. There is no centre from which theology radiates centrifugally to other localities in global terms; rather, theology is always a local enterprise.

Local theology in Korea necessarily focuses on the lives and voices of Christians in

² Kim Kwangsik, *Hanguk chonggyo munhwa wa Kūrisūdo* (한국종교문화와 그리스도, Christ and Korean Religious Culture) (Seoul: Handŭl Press, 1996), 17.

³ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 5.

Korean since the advent of Christianity in the peninsula more than two hundred years ago. It is theology of Korean Christians who, in the cultural specificities of Korea, have tried to express their Christian faith in local Korean terms, rather than imitate the Christianity imported by Western missionaries. The question is not whether their voices exist, but whether they have been listened to. It is the contention of this thesis that Korean Christians do speak in their local voices, but that these have not been listened to, either by Western Christianity or by Western-orientated Korean churches.

For instance, there have been two types of local theology in Korean Christianity: one is indigenised theology, and the other is *minjung* theology. These reflected the struggles of African and Asian theologians against Westernised Christianity from the 1950s onwards. The former was rooted in the cultural context of Korea in the 1960s following the Korean War, while the latter arose in the political and economic context of Korea in the 1970s. Both tried to use the non-Western and plural frameworks of the Korean religious situation as the context for the re-interpretation of Christian theology. However, each in different ways depended on imported theological methods and failed to root themselves effectively in the local resources of Korean culture and religious experience. They therefore failed to attract the lasting commitment of Korean Christians, and the main Korean churches reacted negatively to them.⁴ Their rise and demise created a negative attitude to local theology and discouraged Korean theologians from adopting local approaches to theology. Korean churches preferred to adhere to quantitative strategies of church growth that combine the theological conservatism of imported missionary Christianity with a certain leader's charisma that serves as a source of blessing for his congregation.⁵ Consequently, any theology that threatens these attitudes and tendencies is regarded as a heresy.

⁴ Kim Kwangshik, *T'och'akhwa wa Haesŏkhak* (토착화와 해석학, Acculturation and Hermeneutics) (Seoul: Taehankigogyo Press, 1993), 19.

⁵ For details of Korean churches' policy of growth on the basis of charisma, see Hong Younggi, *Dynamism and Dilemma: The Nature of Charismatic Leadership in the Korean Mega-churches*, unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2000.

In focusing on the theological contribution of Ryu Yŏngmo, this thesis will seek to identify an alternative approach to the construction of a local Korean theology. Ryu Yŏngmo cannot be accused of having imported his theological ideas from sources outside Korea. His theology was developed entirely within his local context and was inseparably related to his personal style of living that progressively separated itself from institutional forms of Korean Christianity and the Western influences that shaped them. This enabled him to engage in a direct, intimate and intense personal interaction with Korean religious pluralism, and through this experience he developed a genuinely local Korean theology, expressed in genuinely vernacular terms. The thesis will argue that Ryu Yŏngmo's theology deserves to be listened to by the Korean churches themselves in order to make sense of the Christian message amid the reality of other religious traditions.

Local theology must not be confused with parochialism. Local theology must be genuinely rooted in the particularities of a given locality, but from this context it should have the capacity to dialogue with other local theologies, on the understanding that no single local theology can legitimately claim universal value. Rather, Christian theology should be understood as a multiplicity of local theologies that exist in mutually enriching dialogue among themselves. On this principle, this thesis will also argue that Ryu Yŏngmo's theology merits careful attention by Western Christianity, which in its own local experiences is faced by questions of religious pluralism. It is important that Western theologians should cease addressing religious pluralism in other parts of the world before they have learnt to engage with religious pluralism as a local reality of increasing importance throughout the West. It is the contention of this thesis that, as they do so, there may be profit in their attending to the methods by which Ryu Yŏngmo developed his theology amidst Korean religious pluralism. Furthermore, by bringing Ryu Yŏngmo into dialogue with selected Western theologians of religious pluralism, it is possible to establish an inter-contextual framework within which to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Ryu's local theology.

C. Ryu Yŏngmo as the Subject of This Study

It is an ambitious goal to research Ryu Yŏngmo and his theology, but the attempt is justified on account of the paucity of existing scholarly studies. Such studies as exist have been undertaken mainly by Ryu's disciples, people whose aim is to continue and expand his thought, rather than to submit it to critical examination. Moreover, none of the existing studies have attempted to elucidate the methods and characteristics of Ryu's theology as local theology.

Ryu lived from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, during the most turbulent period of Korean history, to which reference has already been made. Amidst this turmoil, institutional Christianity in Korea accepted the conservative views of Western missionaries with little criticism and had no interest in developing Christian theology from a local standpoint. It is in contrast to this situation that Ryu's theology gains in significance as a serious attempt to offer an alternative approach, developing a local theology through his own multi-religious experience. In so doing he offers Korean Christians the possibility of an open-minded interaction with other religions without losing the essence of Christian identity. Therefore, to bring Ryu's theology to light as a local theology will exemplify how it is possible for local theology to embrace the multi-religious situation of Korea in a constructive way.

There are three additional reasons for selecting Ryu Yŏngmo as the subject of this doctoral research. Firstly, his significance is beginning to be more widely recognised among Korean theologians, who see in his approach to theology the potential for answering problematic issues facing Korean churches in the present day, and who see in his life an example of someone who authenticated the local credentials of his theology by the manner in which he practised his thought in the way he lived.

Two examples of contemporary Korean theological appreciation of Ryu's thought can be cited. The *minjung* theologian, Ch'ae Suil, believes that Ryu's theology offers

a new possibility in Korean theology,⁶ and the Catholic theologian, Chŏng Yangmo, points out that, “amazingly, Tasŏk [i.e. Ryu’s diary] already occupies a plural religious standpoint in 1912, and he takes precedence by 70 years over pluralist theologians of the present-day”.⁷

Secondly, Ryu’s disciples and their publications are also becoming more influential in Korean society and Christianity. Among them, Ham Sŏkhŏn (함석헌, 咸錫憲, 1901-1989) and Kim Kyosin (김교신, 金敎臣, 1901-1945) have an important place in contemporary Korean Christianity. Ham Sŏkhŏn has emphasised the need for Korean Christianity to affirm its national identity; he played a leading part in the practical theology movement that contributed so significantly to the democratisation movement of the 1980s.⁸ His disciples have continued to publish and be active up to the present, ensuring that Ham’s life and thought are actively preserved in Korean Christian consciousness. Kim Kyosin has had an enormous impact on the dialectic between conservative⁹ Christian faith and the secularisation of Korean society that is part of the globalisation of Western socio-cultural influences. He attempted to overcome secularisation by re-asserting a form of conservative faith through a parachurch movement that is continued by his disciples. Kim’s thought is disseminated through the Christian magazine *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* (성서조선), which he founded and which continues to enjoy an extensive readership. Ham and Kim both depend on Ryu Yŏngmo as the fundamental source of their theological ideas, and it is important

⁶ *Saenuri* (새누리) newspaper, 1995. 10. 21

⁷ Chŏng Yangmo, “Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo sonsaeng ūi Sinang (다석 유영모 선생의 신앙, The Faith of Ryu),” *Chonggyo sinhak yŏngu* (종교신학연구, The Study of the Theology of Religions) 6 (1994), 15.

⁸ Ham Sŏkhŏn was strongly against the military dictatorship government of Korea from 1960, and deeply involved in democratic movements in theoretical as well as practical ways. In particular, his articles appeared in the journal, *Sasanggye* (사상계, The Thought), in order to enlighten the people, the so-called *minjung*, and he issued the journal, *Ssial ūi Sori* (씨알의 소리, the Sound of Ssial) in 1970 after *Sasanggye* journal ceased to be published by the military government. Moreover, he supported and took an active part in movements for democratisation in Korea. Accordingly, he was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 and 1985 in recognition of his contribution to Korean democratisation. The core thought of Ham is well demonstrated in his book, *Ttūt ūirobon Hanguk Yŏksa* (뜻으로 본 한국역사, Korean History by the Meanings). For details, See Ham Sŏkhŏn, *Ttūt ūirobon Hanguk Yŏksa* (뜻으로 본 한국역사, Korean History by the Meanings) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1986).

⁹ The meaning of conservative in this research indicates not political directness but characteristic of faith centering on the life to come as an opposing attitude against Ham Sŏkhŏn’s faith activeness.

therefore that there should be a critical understanding of the wellspring of this contemporary movement in Korean theology and church life.

It is to be noted, thirdly, that, neither Ryu nor his disciples presented their theological ideas in a systematic form, and far less did they attempt to relate them to the developing awareness of religious pluralism among Christian theologians in other parts of the world. This is not to argue that systematic expression is a necessary feature of local theology. Indeed, it will be shown in later chapters of this thesis that Ryu gave much greater significance to enlightenment than to exposition, to experience over interpretation, and to faith-filled praxis over philosophical explanation. These, it will be argued, are traits which authenticated Ryu's theology in local experience and which make it attractive to contemporary Korean Christian theologians such as those mentioned above, who are themselves searching for authentic ways of developing local theology. But in order to protect local theology from parochialism, and to enable it to be in dialogue with local theologies in other contexts, there is value in drawing out its elemental principles. This is the task that will be undertaken in this thesis, with every caution being observed against distorting the nuances of Ryu's thought. Such systematic exposition as is possible must preserve the religious traditions and forms of speculation in Korea as they are, or else the theology loses its local character. But the effort is worthwhile if it serves to bring Ryu's theology into interaction with other local theologies, and thus throw light on contemporary theological reflection on issues of religious pluralism in the East and the West.

In examining the basic elements of Ryu's thought, the thesis will suggest that these illustrate four essential dimensions of local theology in Korea. The first is that there must be a correspondence between theological thought and faithful living. In terms of the events of his own life, which will be examined in Chapter 3, it will be shown that Ryu lived his theology before he ever wrote it. This is something that marked him out among of other Korean Christians of his day in the sense that he committed

himself to living his understanding of what it means to be faithful to Jesus Christ before God, in a life of personal asceticism that sought self-cultivation without regard for public esteem. It is remarkable that he persisted in ascetic practices despite the many adversities and social, political, and economic changes that were effecting Korea at the time.

The second dimension of his thought that is essential for local Korean theology is that he acquired his knowledge of other religions through personal experience as well as academic study. He regarded these religions not as other in the sense of being 'alien' to one's self or to Christianity. They were part of the culture to which he belonged, of the upbringing he had in his youth, and of the immediate world of experience in which he accepted, lived and interpreted his Christian faith. His remarkable achievement is that he integrated religious pluralism in his own being and, as a consequence, in his own thought. This, it will be argued, enabled him to overcome one of the limitations that effects Christian theologies of religious pluralism in other parts of the world: namely, the hesitation to allow Christianity to interpenetrate with other religions without invoking the charge of syncretism, thereby closing off this form of inter-religious experience as illegitimate.

The third element of Ryu's approach that this thesis will attempt to elucidate is the way in which he combines practical and theological dimensions of religious pluralism at the same time. It will be shown that he was not interested in a merely theoretical understanding of other religions as sources from which he could derive insights for his Christian theology. His practical approach to the experience of Christian faith, amidst his on-going experiential engagement with other Korean religions, is characteristically expressed in what he termed *Kwi-il* (귀일, returning to the One). This will be examined in Chapter 6, where it will be shown that he practised his Christian faith in a daily life of religious pluralism, which betrayed not a trace of theological exclusivism.

Fourthly, from this experiential practice of religious pluralism as the basis of his local theology, it will be argued that Ryu was able to comprehend the multi-religious situation innately through recognising and experiencing interactions between different religions, and thus he formed his own theological framework and concepts. He was arguably the first Korean to interpret Christian theology thoroughly in terms of Korean religious pluralism. The eighteenth-century Confucian scholar, Yi Pyŏk (이벽, 李蘊, 1754-1786), by contrast, was interested only in the encountering of Christianity and Confucianism.¹⁰

D. The State of Current Scholarship

It has already been noted that there has been very little scholarly analysis of Ryu's thought in Korea and no significant interpretation in English, or any other Western language, to make it accessible to Western theologians of religious pluralism. Most publications by Ryu's disciples, particularly Park Yŏngho and Kim Hŭngho, focus more on disseminating their master's thought loyally than on analysing it theologically. Moreover, since writings edited and published by disciples tend to depend on their memories and notes on Ryu's lectures and explanations, it is hard to categorise them as theological analyses. Three short Master's dissertations have been written on aspects of Ryu's thought, but so far, not a single doctoral thesis has been devoted to Ryu Yŏngmo, either in Korean or in English.

Recently, a number of Korean Christian theologians have contributed articles about Ryu Yŏngmo to academic journals.¹¹ Most of these are rather general in content, offering descriptive accounts of his life and thought, but with little attention to theological analysis. Exception from this generalisation can be made only for two articles. The first is – by Ch'oi Insik, entitled “Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Christo Ihae

¹⁰ For details of Yi Pyŏk's effort, see Ri Sŏngbae, *Confucianism and Christianity* (Waekwan: Benedict Press, 1979).

¹¹ For a listing of these works, see in this chapter G 2c.

(다석 유영모의 그리스도 이해, *Tasö̅k Ryu Yö̅ngmo's Understanding of Christ*),” which examines Ryu’s Christology. Ch’oi Insik was the first theologian to examine this central aspect of Ryu’s thought, which will be the subject of Chapter 5 of the present thesis. As a systematic theologian, Ch’oi analysed Ryu’s understanding of Christology through a comparison with historical elements of Western systematic Christology, with particular attention to Stoicism and Gnosticism. The weakness of this approach is that it detaches Ryu’s understanding of Christology from his life and the religiously plural context of his personal experience, with the result that the comparison has a ring of artificiality. It ignores the fact that Ryu himself had no knowledge of, or intellectual contact with the history of Christology in Western Christian thought. This illustrates the need to analyse Ryu’s Christology, and the rest of his theology, within the primary framework of East Asian thought if scholarship is to do justice to their inherent quality as local theology. The same criticism must be made of the publications by Park Kyö̅ngsö̅ and Ryu Chaesin, which follow the basic methodology of Ch’oi’s study and fail to offer a new insight into the local character of Ryu’s understanding of Jesus as Christ.

The second article worthy of special note is by Sim Ilsö̅p, entitled “*Tasö̅k Ryu Yö̅ngmo ü̅i Chonggyo tawö̅n Sasang kwa T’och’ak Sinang* (유영모의 종교다원 사상과 토착 신앙, *The Multi-religious Thought and Indigenous Belief of Ryu Yö̅ngmo*)”. This concentrates on Ryu’s understanding of God as ‘Existence and Non Existence’, but does so only with reference to Ryu’s diaries and *Tasö̅k-ö̅rok*.¹² As will be argued in Chapter 4 of this thesis, which deals with Ryu’s understanding of God, this also is best comprehended when analysed theologically on the basis of Ryu’s interaction with East Asian thought. This essential dimension is, however, ignored by Sim.

The state of current scholarship on Ryu Yö̅ngmo can therefore be summarised as follows. Although there has been considerable interest in his biography, there has

¹² *Tasö̅k-ö̅rok* is the published book of recoding lectures of Ryu Yö̅ngmo in YMCA.

been insufficient recognition that it is from the context of his personal life that his theological ideas developed, and in this context that they find their primary meaning. Reflecting the fact that much of Korean theology continues to look to the West for its legitimation, scholars have reached for Western parallels to Ryu's thought rather than seeing it in its dynamic inter-relationship with East Asian religions and culture. Biographical theology has enabled scholars to establish connections between Ryu's thought and important theological themes concerning contemporary Korean Christianity. It is further recognised that Ryu provides a possible way for Korean Christian theology to address issues of religious pluralism that the legacy of missionary Christianity continues to neglect. In this regard, it is appreciated that Ryu offers an alternative both to the theological exclusivism of mainstream Korean Christianity, and to imported models of religious pluralism that originate in contexts quite different from that of Korea. However, these outcomes fail to address the full depth of theological issues arising from religious pluralism. Furthermore, they fail to deal with arguably the most important element of Ryu's thought in this elaboration of *Kwi-il* as a multi-religious way of 'returning to the One', as a theology of practice and a practical faith.

It is such shortcomings in contemporary scholarship on Ryu Yŏngmo that this thesis will attempt to re-address. The departure point and perspective of the present research is that facts of Ryu's biography clearly indicate that, with the exception of a short period of study in Japan, his experience and learning were entirely local in the sense of being rooted in Korean cultural realities. This is confirmed by his conscious decision to write in the Hangŭl vernacular and Sino-Korean. He was emphatically a 'local' theologian, and his thought can properly be analysed and understood only within the context of the world of Eastern thought which he inhabited intellectually and spiritually. On this basis, theological consideration of Ryu Yŏngmo's life and thought must take into account how his theology was affected by the situation of religious plurality in Korea. Only as this is achieved is it legitimate to bring Ryu's theology into comparative engagement with, for example, Western Christian thought,

though the latter also should be considered as a form of local theology, with no *a priori* privilege as a normative theology.

E. Research Hypotheses

From the perspective outlined above, several key research questions arise that will be pursued in this thesis. They can briefly be stated as follows:

- What were the factors that motivated Ryu Yŏngmo to develop a local theology?
- What methods did Ryu Yŏngmo use to embrace religious pluralism as the context of his local theology?
- How successfully did Ryu Yŏngmo's understanding of God as *Han'uhnim* integrate Confucian, Buddhist and Christian concepts of Existence and Non-Existence?
- What did Ryu Yŏngmo mean by *Ŏl* in relation to Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian faith?
- How do practice and theory coalesce in Ryu Yŏngmo's understanding of *Kwi-il* as 'returning to the One'?
- On the principle that any local theology should be capable of communicating critically with other local theologies, to what extent does Ryu Yŏngmo's approach to religious pluralism offer itself for dialogue with Western Christian theologians who are also concerned with re-assessing the historic tradition of Christian theology in light of the experience of religious pluralism in the West?

In seeking to answer these research questions, the following hypotheses will be examined in the three main parts into which the thesis divides. It will be argued that:

- Ryu Yŏngmo's theology is authentically local to the Korean experience of religious pluralism by virtue of its being rooted in, and expressed through, his personal religious life and reflection.
- Ryu Yŏngmo's local theology attempted to re-interpret his understanding of God and Jesus Christ in an affirmative relationship with Confucian and

- Buddhist thought, through the medium of Korean vernacular terminology.
- Ryu Yŏngmo's local theology of engagement with Confucian and Buddhist thought, while being derived from his personal life experience, offers theological insights into the nature of God and Jesus Christ which can communicate with local theologies in contexts of religious pluralism in the West.

F. Methods and Organisation of the Research

This study primarily employs theological analysis, aiming at systematising and evaluating Ryu's theological ideas, respecting the fact that his characteristic form of literary expression was non-systematic and relied heavily on metaphor and poetic meditation in private notes entered into his diaries. While it is evident that such writings provided fertile resources for his disciples to express their religious experiences and to deepen their individual understanding of religion, it is equally apparent that Ryu's literary style eludes easy analysis in terms of a systematic understanding of his thought. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to embark on theological analysis in order for those who are distant from Ryu in terms of time and place to share his religious experience. To the degree that it is possible to render Ryu's thought in systematic theological terms, it will help us to comprehend how he was able to re-interpret the religious concepts that he originally learned from missionaries through inter-action with indigenous Korean religious traditions based on Confucianism and Buddhism. This will be the focus of the central part of the three main chapters of this thesis: Chapter 4 examines Ryu's understanding of God as *Han'uhnim*; Chapter 5 analyses his Christology in the relationship between *Ōl* as Christ and the human Jesus; and Chapter 6 deals with the Ryu's concept of *Kwi-il*, 'returning to the One', in which theory and practice converge.

For reasons that have already been explained, it is not possible to account for Ryu's theological ideas except in their intimate relationship with his personal biography. Therefore, while this thesis seeks to offer a systematic interpretation of Ryu's

thought, it cannot ignore the biographical dimension that inter-relates practice and theory. This approach recognises that Ryu's theology is not simply a theory but is embodied in his life. Ryu's biography will be examined in Chapter 3, on the basis of which it will be possible to answer such questions as: 'how did Ryu's religious experiences affect his life?' and 'how can theology function desirably in human life?'.

Given that religious pluralism was the living context in which Ryu engaged his theological task, an accurate understanding of relevant religious concepts in Confucianism and Buddhism is essential. A phenomenological dimension is therefore necessary, in order to examine the religions with which Ryu's thought engaged and his methods of engaging with them. This will be the method employed in Chapter 1, which examines the character of religious pluralism in the history of Korean society. This in turn will enable a clearer assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Ryu's attempt to create an authentically local theology.

Historiographical methodology will be used in Chapter 2, which offers an analysis of the historical growth of Christianity in Korea. A great deal of historical writing already exists on this subject. The specific focus of Chapter 2, however, is upon the history of Christian missionary attitudes toward Korean indigenous religions. This provides the background of the kind of approach to religious pluralism that Ryu was to abandon in early adulthood, and which thereafter he sought to overcome by developing his alternative theological method.

Finally, in Chapter 7, which attempts to view Ryu's theological ideas in critical dialogue with selected Western Christian theological approaches to religious pluralism, a comparative methodology will be employed. The aim here will be to identify contemporary issues in religious pluralism which mirror Western local interests and necessities, and bring them into dialogue with the outcomes of Ryu's theology without bias, to explore the degree to which the insights of one may inform and enrich the other, thus revealing the global significance of local theologies on the basis of

dialogues between various local theologies.

G. Sources

1. Review of Primary Sources

Ryu Yŏngmo never published a book, even though he cultivated many disciples and lectured for many years (1928-1963) in public. Some of his writings took the form of journal articles, but even these did not aim to lay his theology before the public, but rather to express his sympathy for a departed friend. His preferred style of writing was in the form of personal notes entered in his diaries. Among these he once wrote: “Do not show yourself but try to hide beyond the world. The more you hide yourself, the more fully you feel joy. This is because you can go higher.”¹³ On the other hand, if he did publish something, it was not for his own sake as much as for the sake of others. This is evident in his published writing on non-theological topics, such as his commentary on the metric system¹⁴ in 1928, which was intended to help people to understand it better. In terms of theology, however, Ryu was faithful to his principle of discretion, and he steadfastly avoided attracting public attention that would focus on his person.

Despite this, Ryu left much unpublished writing. One of the most significant works, identified by his disciples after his death, was the diary that he kept for almost twenty years, from April 26th 1955 to January 1st 1975. It runs to three thousand pages, written in Korean as well as Sino-Korean (Old Chinese), and was reproduced by phototypography in 1982, the year following his death.¹⁵ His disciples, Kim Hŭngho, Park Yŏngho, and Sŏ Yŏnghun, published a facsimile of Ryu’s diary under the title

¹³ In original text: 세상에 나타나려고 하지말고 숨으려고 하라. 숨으면 숨을수록 더 기쁨이 충만하게 된다. 그것은 더 높이 올라갈 수 있기 때문이다.

¹⁴ Ryu Yŏngmo, *Metūrū Yohyang* (메트르 요향, A Commentary on the Metric System) (Kyŏngsŏng: Kaesŏngsa, 1928).

¹⁵ This phototypography was copied by Kim Hŭngho at first hand in two volumes, and one more volume was added later. However, this was not published officially.

Tasök-ilji (다석일지, Ryu's diary)¹⁶ in 1990. This consists of four volumes: Volume 1, of 848 pages, covers the period from April 26th 1955 to December 19th 1961; Volume 2, of 834 pages, runs from January 1st 1962 to January 1st 1971; Volume 3, of 792 pages, continues from January 1st 1971 to January 1st 1975.¹⁷ The fourth volume gathers together his other writings and notes which do not appear in his diary.

This diary is regarded as important because it was written through the years when Ryu's thought was maturing, and therefore reveals the main core of his ideas. According to his disciple, Kim Hŭngho, it bears the clear imprint of Ryu's beliefs and theology, showing how these were related to his religious experience.¹⁸ It reveals Ryu's intense piety in respect of Jesus Christ, while at the same time evidencing ways in which his piety was infused with insights from Buddhism and Confucianism which he integrated with his Christian beliefs.

However, as Yu Tallyŏng points out, although the diaries are written in Korean characters, Ryu's language is not easy to follow.¹⁹ This is because he employs the old forms of Korean characters and creates new terms that are intended to overcome the limitations of human expression. To facilitate comprehension, therefore, his disciples Kim Hŭngho and Park Yŏngho prepared several annotated versions of the diaries under the title, *Tasök Myŏngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasök). For instance, Kim Hŭngho published an interpretation of all the poems that Ryu included in his diaries (1998), and more recently, Park Yŏngho has published ninety-nine of the poems in Sino-Korean characters (2000). These interpretations, while lacking critical apparatus, provide a crucial guide to some of the complexities of Ryu's thought. The present researcher has therefore decided to include them among the primary sources of research data.

¹⁶ Ryu Yŏngmo, *Tasök-ilji* (다석일지, Ryu's diary) (Seoul: Hongikje, 1990).

¹⁷ The parts from December 6th 1957 to October 8th 1958 and from March 17th 1972 to April 13th 1973 are missing.

¹⁸ Kim Hŭngho, ed., *Tasök Myŏngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasök), Vol. 1, (Seoul: Sŏngch'ŏnmunhwajaedan, 1998), 7.

¹⁹ From the Preface to *Tasök Myŏngsangrok*, 5.

Another important work, edited by Ryu's disciple, Park Yŏngho, in 1993 is the *Tasŏk-ŏrok* (다석어록, Analects of Tasŏk)²⁰. This comprises two collections of lectures that Ryu gave at the YMCA in Seoul. The first includes the weekly lectures that Ryu gave at the YMCA during the years 1956 and 1957. They were edited in Hangŭl characters and reproduced in stenographic form by Kim Hŭngho. They were subsequently published in the magazine *Sasaek* (사색, 思索, Speculation), which was produced by Kim Hŭngho for twelve years, between 1970 and 1981. They are also included in a book entitled, *Chesori* (제소리, Voice of Awakening) which Kim Hŭngho published in 1983, and this is included in volume four of *Tasŏk-ilji*. The second set, dating from 1960 to 1961 was recorded in handwriting by Ryu's disciple, Chu Kyusik (주규식). These lectures interest us more than his diary because they contain Ryu's own explanations of his poems, whereas these are recorded in his diaries without commentary. Thus, *Tasŏk-ŏrok* is the prime source for understanding theological issues in Ryu's thought.

In addition to these primary sources, articles that Ryu published in journals have also been considered. Five of his articles appeared in *Ch'ŏngch'un* (청춘, 青春, Youth),²¹ a monthly magazine that was launched on 1st October 1914 by one of Ryu's friends, Ch'oi Namsŏn. Ryu's contributions covered a range of issues: "Na ŭi Ilisamsa (나의 일이삼사, My One-Two-Three-Four, Vol.2, 1914)", "Hwalbal (활발, Sprightliness, Vol.6, 1915)", "Nong-u (농우, Farming Cattle, Vol.7,)", "O-nŭl (오늘, Today, Vol.14, 1918)", and "Muhandae (무한대, Infinity, Vol.15, 1918)". This variety of topics indicates Ryu's enthusiasm for enlightening people on different issues of contemporary concern that were not directly related to his religious opinions. As Park Yŏngho stresses, these articles are good material with which to

²⁰ Ryu Yŏngmo, *Tasŏk-ŏrok* (다석어록, Analects of Tasŏk) (Seoul: Hongikje, 1993).

²¹ This magazine aimed to heighten nationalistic thought, and continued till March 1915, vol. 6, but ceased to be published because it was against 'national policy' under the Japanese colonial government. It was revived, fortunately, from 16th May 1917 onwards and was encouraged and welcomed by most Koreans and intellectuals. However, it was not published every month but skipped two or three months, and eventually it was completely discontinued in 26th September 1918, vol. 15 by the Japanese colonialists.

investigate “Ryu Yŏngmo’s thought in his twenties”.²²

Besides these, most of Ryu’s writings about religious thought appeared in *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* (성서조선) which was launched in July 1927 by Kim Kyosin, Ham Sŏkhŏn, Song Tuyong (송두용, 宋斗用), Chŏng Sanghun (정상훈, 鄭相勳), Yu Sŏktong (유석동, 柳錫東), and Yang Insŏng (양인성, 楊仁性).²³ This was a kind of Christian magazine, but it put much emphasis on arousing national consciousness. Ryu’s writings started to appear from May 1937, (volume 100), with a memorial address for the late Kim Chŏngsik.²⁴ These articles are as follows:

- May 1937 / No. 100 Ko Samsŏng Kim Chŏngsik sŏnsaeng (고 삼성 김정식 선생, The late Samsŏng Kim Chŏngsik)
- May 1939 / No. 124 Hoam Mun Ilp’yŏng hyŏng i mŏnjŏ kasinŭndŏe (호암 문일평 형이 먼저 가시는데, While a brother, Hoam Mun Ilp’yŏng, has gone first)
- April 1940 / No. 131 Kyŏljŏnggam i ittŭra (결정함이 있으라, The Decision Has to Be Reached)
- August 1940 / No. 133 Chŏnyŏk ch’ansong (저녁 찬송, A Hymn of Evening)
- September 1941 / No. 152 Kibyŏl (기별, Tidings)
- October 1941/ No. 153 Naksang yugam (낙상유감, Regrets after Getting Hurt by a Fall)
- November 1941/ No. 154 Sosik (소식, News)
- December 1941 / No. 155 Sosik 2 (소식2, News 2)
- January 1942 / No. 156 Sosik 3 (소식3, News 3)
- February 1942 / No. 157 Purŭsinji 38nyŏnmane mitŭme tŭrŏgam (부르신지 38년만에 믿음에 들어감, 38 years later when he had a calling)
- March 1942 / No. 158 News 4: Uriga nyugyero kaorik’a? (소식4: 우리가 뉘게로 가오리카?, A news 4: whom we wave to see)

²² Park, Yŏnggho, *Ssial* (씨알, Seed), (Seoul: Hongikje, 1985), 155.

²³ At first, it was published quarterly, but then published monthly. From May 1930, vol. 16, to March 1942, vol. 158, Kim Kyosin was the chief editor. It had a circulation of around three hundred.

²⁴ Kim Chŏngsik’s significances appear in Chapter 3.

Park Yŏngho points out that these articles express Ryu's maturing thought through his late forties to his early fifties, and comprise the primary source of his ideas prior to the beginning of his diary in 1955. Park republished these articles in full in volume four of *Tasŏk-ilji*.²⁵ In addition, an article by Ryu's master, Yi Sŭnghun, was contributed to the first edition of a magazine, *Tongmyŏng* (동명), edited by Ch'oi Namsŏn.²⁶

Another primary source of Ryu's thought is found in the translation of religious scriptures that he undertook as part of his discipline of studying other religions. While he was reading the scriptures of Taoism and Confucianism, he translated much of them into Korean characters. In 1959 he made a complete translation of the Taoist scripture, *Lao-tzu* (노자, 老子), and in 1968 he translated the Confucian, *Chungyong* (중용, 中庸, The Doctrine of the Mean). The former translation appeared in volume four of *Tasŏk-ilji* and was published by Park Yŏngho with his commentary under the title *Noja Essey* (노자에 세이, The Essay of Lao-tzu) in 1993. The latter was published in 1994, under the title *Chungyong Essey* (중용에 세이, The Essay of Chungyong). Furthermore, Ryu partly translated into Korean the Four Books and Five Classics, for instance *Nonŏ* (논어, 論語, Analects of Confucius), *Maengja* (맹자, 孟子, Mencius), *Yŏkkyŏng* (역경, 易經, I-ching), and *Sŏkyŏng* (서경, 書經, The Book of History).²⁷

The range of topics that Ryu addresses, and the different stages through which his interest were progressively focussed on religious concerns, reflect the inherently Confucian character of his thought. In this respect Park Yŏngho has drawn attention to a similarity between Ryu and Confucius himself. Reflecting on his own intellectual journey Confucius said: "At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning

²⁵ These are on pages 549 to 608 in volume 4 of *Tasŏk-ilji*.

²⁶ It was a tabloid weekly magazine published by Chin Hakmun (진학문, 秦學文), the publisher and editor, and Ch'oi Namsŏn (최남선, 崔南善), the chief manager, from September 3rd 1922. However, the next year – June 3rd 1923, it was suppressed, as from volume 2, no. 23 (after a consecutive total 41 issues) by the Japanese Colonial government.

²⁷ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 유영모의 생애와 사상, The Life and Thought of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo) (Seoul: Munhwa Ilbo, 1996), 149.

(吾十有五而志于學), at thirty, I stood firm (三十而立). At forty, I had no doubts (四十而不惑), at fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven (五十而知天命). At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth (六十而耳順), at seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right (七十而從心所欲 不踰矩).”²⁸

2. Review of Secondary Sources

a. Biographical Material on Ryu Yŏngmo

Many of Ryu’s disciples have made great efforts to disseminate their master’s thought as widely as possible. Among them, Park Yŏngho, some of whose contributions have already been noted, played a central role, especially in writing Ryu’s intellectual biography under the title *Ssial*. Park personally asked Ryu’s son, Chasang, to preserve his father’s materials before his death, in order to leave his thought and life to posterity.²⁹ Fortunately, on his eighty-first birthday, Ryu gave a full account of his life to Park Yŏngho and Kim Hŭngho. On this basis of these sources, Park prepared a full account of Ryu’s life and thought, and published it in 1985, three years after Ryu’s death.³⁰ Invaluable as this work is for Ryu’s biography and as a guide to his thought, it is lacking in terms of critical historiography and does not provide a reliable system of referencing of materials mentioned in the book.

In Park Yŏngho’s work, Ryu’s life is disclosed through the recollections of disciples. One recollection is in the form of a round-table discussion among disciples who attended a memorial ceremony after his death, and others are based on disciples’ relationships with Ryu. These are to be found in *Tongbang ũi Sŏngin Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo* (동방의 성인 다석 유영모, An Eastern Saint, Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo), edited and published by Park Yŏngho.³¹

²⁸ Confucius, trans. by James Legge, *Confucius* (New York: Dover Publication, 1960), 146-147.

²⁹ From the preface of *Ssial* by Park Yŏngho.

³⁰ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial* (Seoul: Hongikje, 1985).

³¹ Park Yŏngho, ed, *Tongbang ũi Sŏngin Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo* (동방의 성인 다석 유영모, An Eastern Saint, Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo) (Seoul: Muae, 1993).

On the basis of earlier as well as up-to-date sources, Park Yŏngho published a second biography of Ryu in 1996 under the title *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 유영모의 생애와 사상, The Life and Thought of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo).

This contains various additions and revisions of the earlier work. Prior to the publication of this second biography, Park Yŏngho published an extensive account of ‘Ryu Yŏngmo’s thought and belief’ (유영모의 생각과 믿음) in serialised form in the newspaper *Tonga Ilbo* (325 instalments) from May 1994 to December 1995. This, more than any other publication, succeeded in acquainting a large cross section of the Korean public with Ryu’s life and thought, stimulating a public interest which evidences the intellectual and religious significance that Ryu Yŏngmo continues to have in contemporary Korea.

b. Materials which Explain Ryu’s thought

As has already been explained, the distinction between Ryu’s own writings and the editorial interpretations of his disciples is difficult to draw clearly and consistently. Writings by the disciples characteristically intersperse quotation of Ryu’s work with their own interpretations. This is the case, evidently, with the edited diaries, published under the title *Tasŏk-ilji*, which have been included among the primary sources. The distinction can be made more clearly, however, with *Tasŏk’s Complete Collection* (다석사상 전집), written and published by Park Yŏngho between 1994 and 1996. This purports to offer an interpretation of Ryu’s thought, particularly with respect to his understanding of Korean religions. It includes *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Saenggak kwa Mitŭm* (다석 유영모의 생각과 믿음, The Thought and Belief of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo), *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Kiddokkyo Sasang* (다석유영모의 기독교 사상, The Christian Thought of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo), *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Pulkyo Sasang* (다석 유영모의 불교 사상, The Buddhist Thought of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo), and *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Yugyo Sasang 1, 2* (다석 유영모의 유교 사상 상-하, The Confucian Thought of Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo 1, 2). While there is much value in these interpretations, they tell us as much, arguably more, about Park Yŏngho’s thought than that of Ryu Yŏngmo himself. Therefore this important work

is included among secondary, rather than primary sources.

c. Scholarly Studies of Ryu Yŏngmo

An earlier section of these Prolegomena has reviewed the state of current academic scholarship on Ryu Yŏngmo. These take the form of Masters dissertations and published articles. Prior to this thesis, there has been no doctoral study of Ryu's thought. The following is therefore the comprehensive list of current research:

- Chŏng Yangmo, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo sŏnsaeng ũi sinang (다석 유영모 선생의 신앙, The faith of Ryu)," *Chonggyo sinhak yŏngu* (종교신학연구, The study of the theology of religions) 6 (1994).
- Ch'oi Insik, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Kŭrisŭdo ihae (다석 유영모의 그리스도 이해, The understanding of Christ in Ryu's thought)," *Chonggyo Yŏngu* (종교연구, Studies in Religion) No.11 (1995).
- Kim Sŏnbo, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi chonggyo kwan (다석 유영모의 종교관, The religious thought of Ryu)," *Ssialmadang* No. 126-127 (1995).
- Shim Ilsŏb, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi chonggyo tawŏn sasang kwa t'och'ak sinang (다석 유영모의 종교 다원 사상과 토착신앙, The religious pluralist thought and traditional faith of Ryu)," *Kidoggyo Sasang* (기독교 사상, The Christian Thought) (Dec.1993).
- Park Kyŏngsŏ, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Kŭrisŭdogyo Sinang Ihae (다석 유영모의 그리스도 신앙 이해, The Understanding of the Christian Faith of Ryu)," Th. M. Dissertation (Seoul: Hansin University, 1995).
- Yu Yŏngchong, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Saengae wa Chonggyo Sasang Yŏngu (다석 류영모의 생애와 종교사상 연구, Study of Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Religious Thought)," Th. M. Dissertation (Seoul: Kamsin University, 1996).
- Ryu Chaeshin, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ũi Kŭrisŭdo Ihae (다석 유영모의 그리스도 이해, The Understanding of Christ in Ryu's Thought)," Th. M. Dissertation (Seoul: Hansin University, 1997).

H. Organisation of the thesis

Further to the discussion of the main chapters of this thesis in terms of research methods employed, the content of the research will be presented in three parts.

Part One deals with the social and religious context of Ryu Yŏngmo's life, including the legacy of missionary Christianity in Korea against which he was challenged to develop his own theological identity. Chapter 1 introduces the religious pluralism of Korea, and argues that the three indigenous religious traditions – shamanism, Buddhism and Confucianism – interpenetrate each other in the cultural matrix of Korean life as experienced by all Koreans (Chapters 2-3).

Part Two presents the central core of the research in an analysis of the three key elements of Ryu Yŏngmo's theology: his understanding of God as *Han'uhnim* (Chapter 4), his understanding of Christ as *Ŏl* which he then relates to Jesus (Chapter 5); and his understanding of *Kwi-il* as 'returning to the One' (Chapter 6). In these chapters it will be argued that Ryu succeeded in rooting his interpretation of central elements of Christianity in Korean cultural and religious concepts, thus laying the foundations of a genuinely local Korean Christian theology.

Part Three moves beyond the analysis of Ryu's thought in his own local context, and seeks to interpret the principles of his local theology in relation to selected Western theologians who also address questions of Christian theology and religious pluralism. Chapter 7 gives special attention to comparison between theological insights from Ryu on the one hand, and elements of the theological thinking of John Hick (Theocentrism), John B. Cobb (Christocentrism) and Paul F. Knitter (Soteriocentrism) on the other. This leads to the final chapter, Chapter 8, which offers an assessment of Ryu Yŏngmo's local theology as a foundation for constructing Christian theology in the context of East Asian religious pluralism.

Part One
*Korean Religious Pluralism as the Context of Korean
Christianity and Ryu Yŏngmo*

Chapter One. Religious Pluralism in Korea

A. Introduction

This chapter aims to analyse the religious traditions of Korea as the primary spiritual and intellectual context into which Ryu Yŏngmo sought to interpret his understanding of the Christian faith. In so doing this chapter will introduce each of the main religious traditions that described Ryu's local context, and illustrate how they inter-penetrated one another to create the particularly Korean character of religious pluralism with which Ryu engaged as a local Korean Christian theologian. As Schreiter points out in his important work, *Constructing Local Theologies*, local theology¹ is a complicated process, which is "aware of contexts, of histories, of the role of experience, of the need to encounter the traditions of faith in other believing communities".² Therefore, my discussion will investigate the complicated process by which religious traditions developed on Korean soil, as the indispensable framework for a full-scale examination of Ryu's thought.

Religious pluralism in Korea, this chapter will argue, is not simply a matter of different religions existing alongside one another. While each has its own place in Korean history, the existential reality is that each has grown on the foundations of the others in what can be imagined as a layered structure. This image is borrowed from W. C. Smith who shows in his seminal book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, that an individual religion consists of a layering of traditions and beliefs as an organic accumulation of a community's developing religious life.³ The religious traditions of Korea are no exception. Throughout its long history (about 5000 years) it has absorbed three major religious traditions – shamanism, Buddhism and Confucianism

¹ This term is taken from Robert J. Schreiter's idea. Schreiter uses this term primarily to refer to Catholic churches, but we use 'local' to mean Western or non-Western. In other words, 'local' in this study defines any area either in the West or not, supposing that there is no centre in geographical terms. In this light, the term 'local' contains the meanings of indigenous and contextual.

² Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 20.

³ W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 154-169.

– each of which has accumulated essential elements of the local culture, including influences from the other religions that have played their part in the course of Korean history. For this reason, an analysis of the religious traditions of Korea needs to focus on the layered and cumulative structure of Korean religions as much as on the characteristics of each religion. An important element of Smith’s analysis is that religion exists as a living phenomenon in the lives of persons.⁴ This insight will be applied in the later part of this chapter, where it will be shown that the experience of religious pluralism is an inescapable reality for all Koreans. What is true of Korean society is also true of the Korean individual: namely, that religions are experienced not as distinct, separate phenomena, but as traditions that inter-penetrate each other in the accumulated phenomenon of Korean religious pluralism. Thus it is indispensable to analyse both the individual religions and their accumulation in Korean religious culture.

This chapter will advance two hypotheses. It will be argued, firstly, that the phenomenon of religious pluralism in Korea is best understood as a layering of three religious traditions – shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism – not in terms of hierarchy, but in a dynamic relationship involving reciprocal transformation within the Korean context. Having established this first hypothesis, the second main argument of the chapter will build on it, to demonstrate that every Korean experiences religious pluralism as the existential character of Korean culture, recognising difference among religions, while at the same time integrating these within a philosophical, ethical and pragmatic understanding of human and social reality. The evidence to be discussed in relation to these two arguments will provide an essential background to understanding the religiously plural context in which Ryu Yŏngmo developed his local Christian theology.

⁴ W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 156.

B. Korea's Cumulative Religious Tradition

It is important to look into Korean history in order to examine the structure of Korean religious tradition, because the internal development of religious traditions and history are inseparably related. The history of Korea can be divided into several periods: 1) the era of primitive and tribal societies (ca. 2333 B. C. – A. D. 7); 2) the Three Kingdoms (Samguk) and Unified Silla (A. D. 57 – 935); 3) Koryŏ (A. D. 918 – 1392); 4) Chosŏn (1392 – 1910); 5) Japanese colonial occupation (1910 – 1945); and 6) the division of Korea into the South and the North (1945 – present). Each religion, layered as it is with other religions, permeates the nation's history. In other words, the religious structure of Korea has accumulated over many centuries of Korean history, incorporating various religions with the changing times.

In the cumulative structure of Korean religious pluralism, each religion keeps its own vitality without any one religion dominating the others in a hegemonic sense. This can be seen within the pattern of Korean history, even during periods when one religion was privileged by a ruling dynasty. No single religion succeeded in maintaining this privilege indefinitely, for it found its position usurped by another religion. The social influence of each continued to shape Korean society into modern times, with the result that Korean culture comprises an intricate inter-weaving of the religious traditions that have shaped its history. This gives religious pluralism as different texture and feels from that of the West, where religions co-exist as separate identities which may or may not choose to recognise each other. Religious pluralism in Korea has, by contrast, an integrated form, in which one religion is layered over another on a single foundation, with the result that different religions cannot help communicating with each other.

If we take a vertical cross-section of the religious structure of Korea, it is easy to see that the lowest layer comprises shamanism as the traditional religion; upon this is laid Buddhism, and then comes Confucianism. Each represents a different paradigm of religion in the dynamic sense in which Thomas Kuhn coined the concept of

paradigm in the philosophy of science: a paradigm comprises a certain pattern of related phenomena which, by virtue of being organic, are constantly changing with time.⁵

Likewise each of the religions of Korea constitute a paradigm of distinguishable phenomena, organically inter-related and constantly in the process of inner transformation as they interact with the other religious paradigms of Korean culture. In other words, the religious structure of Korea is quite distinctive, not only because each religion once played a predominant role and then lost that power, but also because each is still active as a formative factor in the layered structure of today.

1. *Mu* (무, 巫, shamanism)

Korea's most ancient religion is the shamanistic tradition that is generally believed to go back to the foundation of the ancient nation of Kojosŏn (ca. 2333 B. C.).⁶

Shamanism is known by several terms in the Korean language. Reflecting the Confucian perspective of the Chosŏn period, shamanism was associated with the lower classes of Chosŏn society, and it was referred to pejoratively as *Musok*. To avoid these associations Korean religious scholars today prefer the term *Mugyo*, but this is not used by shamans themselves. They use the term *Mu* to embrace their various religious customs, each of which has its own name.⁷ *Mu* is therefore the term that will be used for shamanism in the present thesis.

It is clear that *Mu* played an important role, both politically and religiously, in ancient Kojosŏn society. This continued until the early Samguk (Three Kingdoms) era (57 B. C. – A. D. 685), when it was gradually transformed in the process of societal development. When Samguk started to reinforce the centralisation of sovereign

⁵ See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁶ See Ryu Tongsik, *Hanguk Mugyo ūi Yŏksa wa Kujo* (한국 무교의 역사와 구조, History and Structure of Mugyo in Korea) (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1975), 27-35; Yi Nŭnghwa, "Chosŏn Musokgo (조선무속고, The Study of Mu in Chosŏn)," *Gye-myŏng*, vol. 19, (1929).

⁷ Cho Hŭngyun, "Mugyo Sasang-sa (무교 사상사, History of Mugyo Thought)," *Hanguk Chonggyo Sasang-sa IV* (한국 종교 사상사, History of Religious Thought in Korea) (Seoul: Yŏnsei University Press, 1992), 223. In this thesis, the researcher uses the term *Mu*.

power, *Mu* was influenced by the newly arrived traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism, which played more prominent roles in Samguk politics.⁸ Accordingly, *Mu* had to surrender its original role as the religion of the state, and to be satisfied with the influence that came through fortune-telling or advising kings. The following two examples, taken from Samguk literature, show clearly that the status of *Mu* believers was reduced, even to the point where they could easily be killed by kings.⁹

In the third year of King Ch'adae (차대, 次大) the king went hunting. A white wolf was crying and following the king, and he shot that wolf but missed. The king asked a *Mu* [i.e. a shaman] the reason, and *Mu* answered that 'the wolf is quite a capricious animal and a white one is particularly so. This is a warning from the gods to reflect on your own behaviour and to cultivate the way of god.' After he heard this, the king was very angry and killed the *Mu*.¹⁰

In the twenty-second year of King Ŭija (의자, 義慈), who was the last king of Paekje (663), a ghost was shouting in the Palace, 'Paekje perishes, Paekje perishes!' and then disappeared into the ground. The king thought it was weird and gave orders to dig into the ground. A turtle was found. A sentence, 'Paekje is like a full moon, and Silla is like a new moon', was written on the back of the turtle. The king asked a *Mu* the meaning, and he said, 'It literally means that a full moon has waned and a new moon waxes.' The king killed the *Mu* in anger.¹¹

These vignettes show that by the time of the Samguk kingdoms, the shaman was reduced to being a fortune-teller and was helpless against a king's anger.¹²

During the Koryŏ period (A. D. 918 – 1392), *Mu* enjoyed a new heyday. There were various national Buddhist conventions, particularly *P'algwanhoe* (팔관회, 八關會, The Assembly of Eight Prohibitions), in which every ordinary Buddhist – excepting the monks and nuns – tried to carry out the eight Buddhist regulations for a day and night. Under the influence of *Mu*, however, these Buddhist events were transformed

⁸ Cho Hŭngyun, *Hanguk ŭi Mu* (한국의 무, Mu of Korea) (Seoul: Minjok munhwasa, 1983), 17-19.

⁹ See Kim Pusik, Yi Pyŏngdo ed., *Samguk Sagi* (삼국사기, 三國史記, Historical Record of Three Kingdoms) (Seoul: Ŭry munhwasa, 1974).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 15, Koguryŏ Pongi 3, Ch'adae Wang 3nyŏn Cho.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 28, Paekje Pongi 6, Ŭija Wang 20nyŏn Cho.

¹² For more examples or details, see Kim Pusik, *Samguk Sagi*.

into popular festivals with drinking, singing, and dancing. This shows that *Mu* retained the capacity to impact every aspect of people's lives regardless of their social strata. But *Mu* was confronted with further difficulties when Confucianism, or Neo-Confucianism, was introduced from China in the late Koryŏ era. With its high esteem for virtue and rites, Confucianism was hostile to the popularist traditions that were associated with *Mu*, and as a consequence *Mu* began to be suppressed and was branded a false religion, called *Musok*.

Chosŏn strictly prevented the performance of shaman rituals in public and demoted them to the lowest rank. Nonetheless, *Mu* maintained a slender existence among Confucian rituals. In particular, *killye* (길례, 吉禮, Congratulatory Ceremony) and the worship of Heaven in Confucian rituals could not be undertaken without the assistance of *Mu*. Moreover, *Mu* as a way of curing diseases was highly respected and continued to be practised by women, especially by the wives of those in high office and low.¹³ Under Japanese colonialism, the suppression of *Mu* continued. Since the Japanese recognised that *Mu* was a foundation of Korean religion and culture, it had to be eliminated as part of the colonial policy of so-called 'culture annihilation', which sought to impose Japanese Shinto. Consequently, all shamans were arrested and investigated by the Japanese police.¹⁴ The Japanese colonial government denounced *Mu* as superstition or demon worship. It is ironic, therefore, that when the Japanese cultural annihilation policy failed, Japanese officials went so far as to license shamans and allow them to perform shamanic rituals, in recognition of the fact that Korean *Mu* was so deeply rooted in the national culture that it could not be uprooted.

Western missionaries displayed a similar negativity toward *Mu* as a religion as had the Japanese and the Chosŏn Confucians before them. As Clark points out, the missionaries incorrectly claimed that there were no concepts of the Ultimate, human

¹³ Kim Honggil, et. al., *Hanguk Chonggyo Sasangsa* (한국종교사상사, Korean History of Religious Thought) Vol. 4, (Seoul: Yŏnsei Taehakkyo Ch'ulp'anbu, 1992), 300.

¹⁴ Cho Hŭngyun, *Hanguk ūi Mu* (Mu of Korea), 26.

guilt, or morality in Korean *Mu*.¹⁵ So they insisted that *Mu* should be eradicated. But as Korea's traditional religion, *Mu* could not be rooted out, even though it had lost its power in the modernisation of Korean society.

Moreover, in the modern period, there has been a resurgence of Korean respect for *Mu* not as an uncivilised or false belief, but as the traditional religion of the nation that goes back to the beginning of Korean history. This has been due to the influence of scholars and researchers who have restored an accurate understanding of *Mu*.¹⁶ On this basis, it is difficult to deny that a major feature of *Mu* – invoking a blessing – is located at the foundation of Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism, and even Protestantism.¹⁷ *Mu* believers and shamans outnumber Protestant believers and priests in Korea. From this point of view, *Mu* still affects many Koreans up to the present day.

According to Cho Hŭngyun, *Mu* has two formative principles: belief in an all-powerful Reality, and the need to ensure the approval of this all-powerful Reality upon all aspects of human life.¹⁸ This means believing in and testifying to a powerful Reality that overcomes human limitations and fulfils human life. On condition that it is understood that this powerful Reality does not necessarily mean a god who relates to human beings as a creator to created beings, *Mu* can be accepted as a kind of religion. But the concept of the powerful Reality in *Mu* is quite different from that of other religions. It does not include the notion of a creator god. Nevertheless, *Mu* cannot be practised or lived without belief in, and the approval of, the powerful Reality. In *Mu*, every single phenomenon of human activity in social, political, and economic terms, and equally relationships between people and nature, must be set within the context of these two principles. The term *Mu* clearly depicts the function

¹⁵ C. A. Clark, *Religions of Old Korea* (New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1929), 173-219.

¹⁶ The new understanding of *Mu* centered on Yi Nŭnghwa (*Chosŏn Musokgo*, 1927), Ch'oi Namsŏn (*Pulham munhwaron*, 1928), and Son Chint'ae (*Chosŏn Singa Yup'yŏn*, 1930).

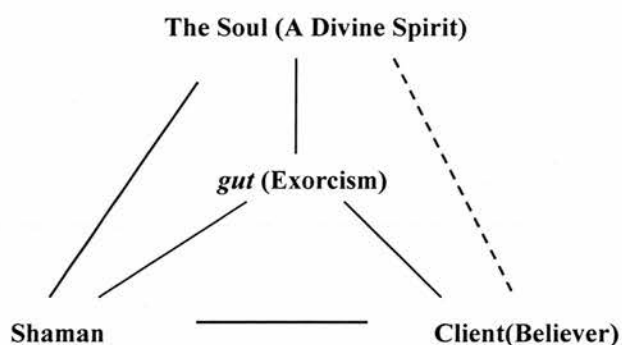
¹⁷ Ryu Tongsik, *Hanguk Chonggyo wa Kidoggyo* (한국 종교와 기독교, Korean Religion and Christianity) (Seoul: Kidoggyo sŏhoe, 1965), 123.

¹⁸ Chŏng Chŭnhong, *Chonggyo Munhwa ŭi Ihae* (종교문화의 이해, Understanding the Culture of Religion) (Seoul: Ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 1996), 179.

of shamans, who connect the spiritual and human worlds.¹⁹ Cho Hŭngyun interprets the Chinese character (巫) as plausibly expressing a scene of shaman ritual or the whole phenomenon of shamanism.²⁰ In this sense, *Mu* in the context of Korea is identical with shamanism in the context of Manchuria and Siberia. There are differences, of course, due to their different historical background; nevertheless, they are quite similar in terms of nature and structure.²¹

The religious influence and vitality of *Mu* can be explained by two distinctive features. The first is the principle of harmony. This principle is revealed clearly in the shaman's ritual of exorcism (*gut*, 굿), which shows the primary structure of *Mu*. The table below illustrates how *gut* functions in such a way as to enable human beings to solve their problems with both the spirits and shamans through religious ritual. Those who have a problem firstly consult a shaman, and then meet the spirits or souls through a shaman's mediation through the process of *gut*, which offers a solution to the problem.

Table 1.²²



¹⁹ According to Chinese epigraphy, the term *Mu* (巫) means a woman who worships an intangible being, dances and is inspired. The Chinese character for *Mu* is constituted by two lines (一, 一) which mean Heaven and Earth, one stroke (丨) which connects the two lines as a 'Cosmic Tree' [M. Eliade, *Pattern in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1963), 70-71.] and a pillar, and two symbols (人, 人) which indicate dancing persons beside the pillar.

²⁰ Cho Hŭngyun, "Mugyo Sasang-sa", 225.

²¹ C. A. Clark, *Religions of Old Korea*, 173.

²² Ch'oi Chunsik, *Hanguk ūi Chonggyo Munhwaro Irgnūnda* (한국의 종교 문화로 읽는다, To Read Korean Religion by Culture) (Seoul: Sagyejŏl, 1998), 16.

The dotted line indicates that believers are not able to contact the spirit world directly, and this fact explains the function of shamans. Shamans enable believers to communicate with the souls in the spirit world and thereby to re-establish harmony. In terms of *Mu*, all the problems of human beings are due to the absence of such harmony. Shamans function to restore harmony through performing *gut*. This process can be described as the principle of harmonisation in the context of *Mu*.²³

The second distinctive feature of *Mu* is the principle of instant resolution of humans' metaphysical problems. Ch'oi Chunsik describes the performance of *gut* as retrogression into the world of instinct which existed before history; the world which is dealt with by *gut* is the world which is beyond human intellect and ethics, the mythical world which is beyond time and space.²⁴ In this manner *Mu* provides an immediate answer to the problems of disease, suffering, anxiety, death, and mystery by providing concrete healing, freeing men from suffering, resolving and accepting mystery, and alleviating the fear of death. By connecting the human being with the psychosomatic causes of physical ailments, *gut* engages the sphere of human fears and desires, to which it provides spiritual remedies. Fundamental to these is the blessing, a formulary of magical power that restores the harmony that has been destroyed or otherwise lost in a believer's life.²⁵ Herein lies the abiding popularity of *Mu* which, as a religion, is not concerned with an abstract inquiry into metaphysical matters, but relates human beings with the spirit world in ways that address concrete problems that human beings experience in everyday life. By instantly resolving humans' instinctive problems *Mu* has been able to maintain its vitality through many centuries of Korean history. Today *Mu* believers and shamans outnumber Protestant believers and clergy in Korea, and through the provision of blessings, *Mu* has a pervasive influence on the popular practice of the other religions in Korea. In this respect it can be said that *Mu* continues to provide the religious base of Korean

²³ Cho Hŭngyun, "Mugyo Sasang-sa", 236.

²⁴ Ch'oi Chunsik, *Hanguk ūi Chonggyo Munhwaro Irgnūnda*, 78.

²⁵ Due to its instinctive nature, *gut* is usually performed from sunset to midnight to early morning. *Ibid.*, 79.

culture, and as such undergirds the ways in which religions encounter each other in Korean society.

2. Buddhism

Buddhism came to Korea in the fourth century A. D., after its long passage from its birthplace in India in the sixth century B. C., and its adaptation to Chinese culture from the first century. In the context of Chinese culture and history, it was the *Mahayana*, or 'Greater Vehicle' form of Buddhism that flourished, allowing as it did the development of various indigenous schools of thought as the means of salvation for the greatest number of people. It was this modified Buddhism that moved on to Korea.²⁶ Although, Confucianism was already present in Korea, it was as yet a ruling national ideology more than a religion, and only developed a popular religious dimension as a result of the influence of Buddhism. Therefore we shall examine Buddhism in the Korean context before moving to Confucianism, even though the latter reached Korea before Buddhism.

Buddhism reached Korea during the period of the Three Kingdoms' era, under whose patronage it became the religion of state. In particular during the Silla state, Buddhism prospered as the national religion through being associated closely with the royal families. By the time of United Silla (통일신라), Buddhism was at its height, and distinguished monks such as Wŏnch'ŭk (원측, 542-640), Wŏnhyo (원효, 617-686), and Ŭisang (의상, 625-702) made significant advances in re-interpreting Buddhism in the Korean context.²⁷ Wŏnhyo's greatest contribution was to provide a historical guide to the formation of the various Buddhist scriptures that were current in Korea of his time. His famous 'Korean Commentary' (*Haedong so*, 해동소) resolved problems of dating and thus helped overcome disputes about the relative authority of individual scriptures. On this basis he was able to harmonise different

²⁶ Buddhism travelled from China to Three Kingdoms' era Korea, specifically, Koguryŏ (A.D. 372), Paekche (A.D. 384), and Silla (A.D. 528). It is generally believed that Buddhism was introduced by an overland route, but it is difficult to exclude the possibility of a sea route. See Chong Byŏngcho, "Bulgyo Sasangsa (불교 사상사, History of Buddhism)", *Hanguk Chonggyo Sasang-sa I* (한국 종교 사상사, History of Religious Thought in Korea) (Seoul: Yŏnsei University Press, 1992), 9.

²⁷ Wŏnch'ŭk played an active part in China, whereas Wŏnhyo and Ŭisang took an active part in Korea.

characteristics of Buddhism in a universalist and syncretistic philosophy.

Wŏnhyo's main philosophical idea was the principle of *Hwajaeng* (화쟁, 和諍), which denotes reconciliation of doctrinal controversy. Applying this to the re-interpretation of Buddhist thought from the time of the Buddha, he sought to draw out the unity of principle that underlies the diversity of doctrines. This is what he meant by the 'unfolding' and 'sealing' (*kaehap*, 개합) of meaning as the prelude to 'reconciliation' (*Hwajaeng*, 화쟁). He explains this in his Commentary of the *Awakening of Faith* (대승기신론) in the following terms:

Such being the intent of this treatise, when unfolded, there are immeasurable and limitless meanings to be found in its doctrine; when sealed, the principle of two aspects in One Mind is found to be its essence. Within the two aspects are included myriad meanings without confusion. These limitless meanings are identical with One Mind and are completely amalgamated with it.²⁸

Wŏnhyo's desire to harmonise differences should not be interpreted as an attempt to suppress diversity. On the contrary, he affirmed diversity on the grounds that each theory expresses part of the truth, however small; equally no single theory can embrace the fullness of truth. So all the doctrinal movements of Buddhism are legitimate but limited ways of expressing the absolute truth, and the aim of *Hwajaeng* is to harmonise these partial perceptions in a wider vision of the truth. Truth itself is best understood as a void – Wŏnhyo here manifests his indebtedness to the *Mahayana* idea that the myriad of existent things have neither 'reality' (실체, 實體) nor 'self' (아, 我) in the Void (공, 空) of the Ultimate. He expresses this idea in his *Exposition of the Adamantine Absorption Scripture* (금강삼매경) as follows:

Now, the fountainhead of the one mind, which is distinct from existence and non-existence, is independently pure. The sea of the three voids, which amalgamates the absolute and mundane, is calm and clear. Calm and clear, it amalgamates duality and yet is not unitary. Independently pure, it is far from the extremes and yet is not located at the middle. It is not located at the middle and yet is far from the extremes. Accordingly, while nothing is negated, there is

²⁸ Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I*, 158.

nothing not negated; while nothing is established, there is nothing not established. This can be called the ultimate principle that is free from principles, the great thusness that is not thus.²⁹

The appreciation of this truth is reached not through intellectual inquiry as much as by spiritual awakening. This, as Park Chonghong has argued, is the inner dynamic of Wŏnhyo's philosophy, in relation to which *Hwajaeng* is the external methodological outworking.³⁰ Application of this inner awakening itself implies two aspects: at one level it requires the harmonisation of different religious perspectives, the work that distinguished Wŏnhyo as a scholar; at another it requires actual living practice. In these dual senses, Wŏnhyo proclaimed himself an 'unhindered man' who sought to re-interpret the truth of Buddhism in a theory and practice appropriate to the Korean context.

In this manner Wŏnhyo laid the intellectual and spiritual foundations upon which Korean Buddhism during the Koryŏ era was able to embrace the arrival of Zen Buddhism from China, known in Korean as *Sŏnjong* (선종, 禪宗). Introduced around the ninth century from China, it offered an attractive alternative to the prevailing *Kyojong* school (교종, 教宗), which was characterised by an elaborate system of dogma and had difficulty in putting its intricate theory into action. In its appeal to intellectuals, *Kyojong* Buddhism had little to offer the common people.³¹ *Sŏnjong*, by contrast, laid its emphasis on immediate awakening by ascetic practices and discipline rather than theoretical investigation. In particular it taught that the Buddha-nature, or the potential to achieve enlightenment, is inherent in everyone, though it lies dormant because of ignorance. The way to awaken this potential is not by intellectual study of the Buddhist scriptures, nor by the practice of good deeds, or

²⁹ Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I*, 145-146.

³⁰ Most Korean scholars agree that the principle of *Hwajaeng* is one of the most excellent theories for understanding Buddhism. For example, Sim Chaeyŏl pays tribute by saying that the *Hwajaeng* principle of Wŏnhyo is the most distinguished achievement in Korean Buddhism, and Lee Ŭlho insists that Wŏnhyo's principle of *Hwajaeng* should be regarded as an immortal achievement, not only in Korean Buddhism but also in the history of Korean thought. See Lee Ŭlho, *Han Sasang ũi Myomaek*, 122.

³¹ Even though Wŏnhyo contributed to a new era in Buddhist history, he could not help being confined within the limits of *Kyojong*.

the scrupulous performance of religious rites and ceremonies; rather, it comes about through meditation that breaks through the boundaries of common, everyday, logical thought. Its appeal to meditation over and against the study of scriptures is what distinguishes *Sōnjong* from *Mahayana* Buddhism, though it remains a legitimate part of the diversity of Buddhism, since it remains committed to the search for enlightenment through awakening.

It was the task of the Korean Buddhist monk, Chinul (지눌, 1153-1210), to integrate *Sōnjong* into the Korean Buddhist context on the basis of Wōnhyo's principle of *Hwajaeng*. He undertook a three-year study of the Buddhist canon in order to establish a scriptural foundation for his vision of a synthesis between doctrinal Buddhism and *Sōnjong*. On the basis of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* (Voluminous Mahayana Buddhist text), and the commentary of the eighth-century Chinese exegete, Li T'ung hsun (李通玄), he drew a distinction between the mind of the Buddha, which was devoted to meditation, and the words of the Buddha, which matured into the doctrinal teaching of Buddhism. Distinguishable as these two aspects are, they belonged to the one Buddha. Just as his words reflected what came to him through meditation, so the doctrinal teaching of Buddhism reflects the mystical knowledge that comes through meditation. This points to the fundamental integration of truth as described through doctrine and truth as experienced through meditation. Chinul's integrated vision of the teaching of the *Avatamsaka* with *Sōnjong* meditation provided an indigenously Korean harmonisation that was distinct from Zen Buddhism in China, and it would remain the basis for later generations of Korean Buddhists.

It was this same principle of harmonisation in Korean Buddhism that enabled it to integrate Korean *Mu* as a complementary religious practice. Buddhist philosophy remained the preserve of intellectuals. Meditation also was a specialised practice, even as *Sōnjong* removed it from the exclusive monopoly of the monks. At the popular level, however, it was *Mu* with its provision of blessing that provided a

simple but effective way of enjoying the benefits of awakening. In important ways the Buddhist monk became the dispenser of the blessings that were traditionally the function of the shaman. This contributed to the consolidation of Buddhist influence in the court of the Three Kingdoms kings. The monk provided the monarch with ritual assurances of personal health and national prosperity in peace and harvest. This guaranteed the political influence of the monks at court, where they acted as political advisors to the kings, who in return rewarded them with gifts that ensured the economic strength of the monasteries. It was in this manner that Buddhist religious ideology helped the kings to consolidate their monarchical authority and to justify their political unification of the state.

Ritual services of blessing were held throughout the Samguk (삼국, Three Kingdom) period and continued into the Chosŏn Kingdom. Although the latter was to privilege Confucianism over against Buddhism as the religion of state, Buddhist popular practices, infused with Korean *Mu*, continued to exert enormous influence among the lower class. The Buddhist monks may have been forbidden freedom of access to the cities of the Chosŏn Kingdom, and Buddhism may have retreated from the public stage. The Confucians may have delighted in condemning Buddhism as the ally of *Musok*. But at the popular level the integration of Buddhist and shamanist practice ensured their survival as the religion of the people.

It is thus evident that Korean Buddhism from the fourth to the fourteenth centuries evolved in a uniquely indigenous way that distinguished it from the Buddhism of either India or China. It was a synthetic religion, accumulating within its own history a diversity of schools of Buddhist thought and practice that had divided Buddhism elsewhere. Furthermore, by integrating the ancient traditions of Korean *Mu* in its popular practice, it rooted itself in the life of the people in a way that was able to withstand the changes of political fortune that diminished its status in the Chosŏn

3. Confucianism

It is uncertain when Confucianism was first introduced into Korea. However, it is clear that Confucianism was already present when Buddhism was imported in the Sanguk period, even though it was obscured by the privilege that Buddhism enjoyed in the courts of the Three Kingdoms. It was not until the new trend of Confucianism, so-called Neo-Confucianism, was established by the Sung dynasty in China (송, 宋, A. D. 906-1279), that Confucianism began to rival Buddhism in the late Koryŏ era.

Classic Confucianism exhibited a strong disposition for organising society on humanitarian principles of governance. It was weaker, however, in developing a proper theoretical foundation for its ethics that originated in ancient feudal society. Neo-Confucianism attempted to overcome this deficit by developing a philosophy that added metaphysical aspects to the obscure thought of Classic Confucian ethics.³³ In particular, adopting Taoist and Buddhist concepts, Neo-Confucianism firmly established the principles of human relations in society that were ignored in Classic Confucianism.³⁴ Based on *T'aegŭk* (태극, 太極, the Supreme Ultimate) and *i/ki* (리 [li] and 氣 [chi], the Principle and Material Force), ontological concepts, *sim-sŏng-chŏng* (심성정, Mind and Nature) principles of humanity, Neo-Confucianism started to shape its metaphysics, human nature, and *sollen*.

In fact, Neo-Confucianism divided into several schools called by various names, principal among which were *Chŏngjuhak* (정주학, 程朱學, Cheng-chu School), *Sŏnglihak* (성리학, 性理學, Sung philosophy), or *Sin Yuhak* (신유학, 新儒學, Neo-Confucianism), *Myŏnghak* (명학, 明學, Ming School), *Yukwanghak* (육왕학,

³² The Buddhist legacy decided 70-80 percent of the outward form of Korean religious culture. Ch'oi Chunsik, *Hanguk ūi Chonggyo Munhwaro Irgnūnda*, 341.

³³ Yu Ch'oha, *Hanguk Sasangsa ūi Insik* (한국 사상의 인식, Recognition of the History of Korean Thought), 72.

³⁴ Yun Sasun, "Hanguk Sŏnglihak ūi Chŏngae wa T'ŭkching (한국 성리학의 전개와 특징, Development and Character of Korean Sŏnglihak)", Cho Myŏnggi ed., *Hanguk Sasang ūi Simch'ŭng* (한국 사상의 심층, the Depth of Korean Thought) (Seoul: Usŏk, 1996), 189.

陸王學, Lu Wang School), and *Simhak* (심학, 心學, School of Mind). Of these, *Sung* philosophy, which had a strong intellectual aspect and centred on Chu Hsi (朱熹, 1130-1200), was introduced into Korea, whereas *Yukwanghak*, which was strong on emotionalism and centred on Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529),³⁵ declined in Korea. As a consequence, Neo-Confucianism in Korea, shaped around the principles of *Sung* philosophy, became the leading religion throughout the five hundred years of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910).

From its inception, the Chosŏn dynasty was governed by the ideal of Neo-Confucianism, the official ideology of the state. It provided a theoretical foundation with which to reject Buddhism and to justify the change of dynasty.³⁶ In other words, as Yu Ch'oha states, Neo-Confucianism became the ideological underpinning of the Asian middle ages, which overcame the aristocratic governing system by allowing social mobility on the basis of a bureaucratic structure.³⁷

Rather than attempting to trace the development of Korean Neo-Confucianism through the five hundred years of the Chosŏn dynasty, the discussion of Neo-

³⁵ Yun Sasun, "Hanguk Sŏngnihak ūi Chŏngae wa T'ŭkching (한국 성리학의 전개와 특징, Development and Character of Korean Sŏngnihak)", 198-199. As a critique of the excessive attention to philological details characteristic of Chu Hsi's followers, Wang Yang-ming allied himself with Lu Chiu-yŭan's learning of the mind. He advocated the precept of uniting thought and action. By focusing on the transformative power of the will, he inspired a generation of Confucian students to return to the moral idealism of Mencius. His own personal example of combining teaching with bureaucratic routine, administrative responsibility, and leadership in military campaigns demonstrated that he was a man of deeds. Despite his competence in practical affairs, Wang's primary concern was moral education, which he felt had to be grounded in the 'original substance' of the mind. This he later identified as *liang-chih* ('good conscience'), by which he meant innate knowledge or a primordial existential awareness possessed by every human being. He further suggested that good conscience as the Heavenly Principle is inherent in all beings from the highest spiritual forms to grass, wood, bricks, and stone. Because the universe consists of vital energy informed by good conscience, it is a dynamic process rather than a static structure. Human beings can learn to regard Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body by extending their good conscience to embrace an ever-expanding network of relationships. For details, see Julia Ching, *To Acquire Wisdom: The Way of Wang Yang-ming* (1976); Tu Wei-ming, *Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yang-ming's Youth (1472-1509)* (1976).

³⁶ Founded in 1392 by General Yi Sŏnggye (이성계, 1392-1398), the Chosŏn dynasty ruled Korea for more than five hundred years, until 1910. The Chosŏn dynasty was established by an alliance based on a symbiotic relationship between a military strongman and a group of reform-minded Confucian intellectuals. The change of dynasty was validated in the name of the Mencian concept of the Mandate of Heaven, as rationalised by the Neo-Confucian scholar-officials, who then went on to dominate the bureaucracy and set up the entire structure of government and society in the hope of realising their Confucian ideals.

³⁷ Yu Ch'oha, *Hanguk Sasangsa ūi Insik* (Recognition of the History of Korean Thought), 73.

Confucianism in Korea in this chapter is intended to illustrate two aspects of its character as an indigenously Korean phenomenon. The first deals with one of the central philosophical problems of medieval Neo-Confucian thought, concerning the relationship between the one and the many. The other concerns the practice of Neo-Confucian rites in the context of family life. In both cases it will be shown that Korean Neo-Confucianism dealt with these issues in characteristically Korean ways, with the result that Korean Neo-Confucianism became thoroughly indigenised in Korean culture.

Neo-Confucianism in China had already engaged the issue of the relationship between *li* as 'principle' and *chi* as 'material force'.³⁸ The debate was continued in Korea in terms of *i* (principle) and *ki* (material force) in the writings of Yi Hwang (1501-1570) and Yi I (1536-1584), grounded in their respective understandings of *sadan* (사단, 四端, the Four Beginnings) and *ch'iljŏng* (칠정, 七情, The Seven Feelings).³⁹ The Four Beginnings comprise *in* (인, 仁, humanity), *ŭi* (의, 義, righteousness), *ye* (예, 禮, propriety), and *chi* (지, 智, wisdom), which are ethical feelings. On the other hand, the Seven Feelings comprise *hui* (희, 喜, joy), *no* (노, 怒, anger), *ae* (애, 哀, sorrow), *ku* (구, 懼, fear), *ae* (애, 愛, love), *o* (오, 惡, hatred), and *yok* (욕, 欲, desire), which are natural states and do not necessarily imply a moral value.

Yi Hwang accepted the view of Chu Hsi that placed its emphasis on the concept of *i* as the principle of myriad things. Chu Hsi believed that good originated from the principle, *i*, while evil came from *ki*, which corrupts *i*. On this premise, Yi Hwang considered that *i* is the higher principle because *sadan* originates from *i*, and that *ki* is the lower principle because *ch'iljŏng* stems from *ki*. Yi Hwang thus distinguished between *i* and *ki*, and argued that *i* is the principle of all things.

³⁸ Hans Küng and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), 82.

³⁹ Yun Sasun, "Hanguk Sŏngnihak ŭi Chŏngae wa T'ŭkch'ing (한국 성리학의 전개와 특징, Development and Character of Korean Sŏngnihak)", 194.

Yi I took the contrary position and argued that it is impossible to distinguish between the two:

Principle (*i*) is above forms; material force (*ki*) is on the level of form. The two cannot be separated from each other. If they cannot be separated, then their issuance as function is single and one cannot speak of them as mutually possessing issuing function.⁴⁰

This shows that realistically *i* and *ki* cannot be separated in reality, even though they can be distinguished conceptually for purposes of intellectual clarification. Yi I emphasised that *i* and *ki* is both one and two, and thus he denied dualistic thought.⁴¹ Furthermore, he argues that even Chu Hsi is wrong if he does not agree with the idea that *i* and *ki* are inseparable.

If Master Chu actually thought that principle and material force have as their function mutual issuances that could be contrasted with one another he is also mistaken.⁴²

Judging by the above statement, Yi I could not accept Yi Hwang's theory of the alternate issuance of *i* and *ki*. Even Yi Hwang adhered to the priority of *i* as the Principle of myriad things, whereas Yi I understood *i* and *ki* as inseparable and complementary beings. However, Yi I was well aware of the interpretation of Chu Hsi's statement of the theory of *hokwŏn hoksaeng* (혹원혹생, 或原或生, [*huo-yuan huo-sheng*]), 'some originate and some beget' which became the basis of Yi Hwang's theory of the alternate issuance of *i/ki*. In other words, without Yi Hwang's academic contribution to systematising Neo-Confucianism, it was not easy for Yi I to induce his integration of *i/ki* based on mutual issuance. Consequently, the theory of Yi I about *i* and *ki* produced not only a belief distinct from the Chinese one, but also the Korean tradition of harmony and creative re-interpretation on the basis of

⁴⁰ Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I*, 634.

⁴¹ Lee Namyŏng, "Chaengjŏm ūro pon Hanguk Sŏngrihak ūi simch'ŭng (쟁점으로 본 한국성리학의 심층)", Cho Myŏnggi ed., *Hanguk Sasang ūi Simch'ŭng* (한국 사상의 심층, The Depth of Korean Thought), 213.

⁴² Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I*, 635.

In the late seventeenth century, Neo-Confucianism started to put more emphasis on Confucian rites grounded on moral justification. This was because of its intellectual aspects, based on rationalism. This tendency induced various serious conflicts in Confucian society, and then caused the religious influence of Neo-Confucianism to weaken. As a reaction to this tendency, *sirhak* (실학, 實學, practical learning) of Neo-Confucianism emerged. This stressed the features of *Kyŏngse-Ch'iyong* (경세치용, 經世致用, administration and practical usage), *Yiyong-Huseng* (이용후생, 利用厚生, technological and economic reform), and *Silsa-Gusi* (실사구시, 實事求是, seeking truth grounded on concrete evidence). These took a more serious view of practical and substantial matters rather than moral justification. But scholars who supported these ideas were usually isolated from the centre of the bureaucracy or out of power, and their opinions were hardly taken into account in the ruling ideology of Neo-Confucianism. In the middle of these conflicts in Neo-Confucianism, Chosŏn Korea founded itself confronted by the aggression of Western imperialism. Chosŏn Korea could not but yield under this pressure and open the door to the West, and so accepted Christianity.

Looking at the long history of Confucianism in Korea, we can discover three main characteristics in terms of the formation of Korean religious thought. The first is the overcoming of dualism on the basis of the tradition of harmony and *Kwi-il* (귀일, 歸一, returning to One). This phase is clearly shown through the integration of *i/ki* by Yi I. Indeed, as stated earlier, it displays the originality of Korean Confucianism, which was not possible on the basis of Neo-Confucian thought itself.

Second, there is the trend of pursuing Confucian rites.⁴³ The primary policy of the Chosŏn dynasty was to disseminate Neo-Confucianism as the religion of the state by encouraging people to become Confucians by preserving Confucian family rites. The

⁴³ Yun Sasun, "Hanguk Sŏngnihak ūi Chŏngae wa T'ŭkching (한국 성리학의 전개와 특징, Development and Character of Korean Sŏngnihak)", 199.

family structure in Korea is founded on a firm ethic of filial piety. This family structure became a prime foundation on which to establish a society and the nation itself.⁴⁴ In this regard, Neo-Confucian development in Korea can be explained on the basis of the study of Confucian rites and their implementation. This development brought an expansion and deepening of ideas of filial piety, and this greatly affects the structure of Korean religious thought.

Nonetheless, the male-dominant characteristics of Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn did not have a profound impact on females either in the high class or in the lower. For them, *Mu* and Buddhism had been major beliefs. In other words, *Mu* and Buddhism seem to have declined in the ruling class, but their influence still remained in the daily life of the commoners.

Neo-Confucianism led by elites of Chosŏn accentuated Confucian rituals and social norms, and encouraged people to keep those rules of Confucianism in order to expand the ruling ideology of Chosŏn politics. As a consequence, even though Confucian rites, such as religious rituals of daily life and national ceremony, ancestor worship, and human relationships, were accentuated by the Chosŏn dynasty, most peoples who were generally exposed to the influences of *Mu* and Buddhism could not help experiencing the underpinning religions and Confucianism at the same time in actual life. It is inevitable that Neo-Confucianism would be newly layered onto the religious experiences of Shamanism and Buddhism. Therefore, it is natural that the Chosŏn era experienced varied religions, because the religious experiences of *Mu* and Buddhism retained their existence among females and lower-class' people, and the belief systems continued to interact from generation to generation.

We have examined the three particular religions which have an important place in the historical evolution of Korean religious pluralism. At the level of external political

⁴⁴ In order to understand the typical structure of society on the basis of familialism in Korea, see Ch'oi Chunsik, *Hangukin ege Munhwa nŭn innŭnga* (한국인에게 문화는 있는가, Is There a Culture in Korea) (Seoul: Sagyejŏl, 1997).

history, each religion knew a period of privilege in which it was associated with the state at a point in its evolution. The foregoing analysis has shown, however, that none of the three religions was able to maintain a political superiority in perpetuity. Yet while the fortunes of each declined at the political level, each continued to be influential among the Korean people in the popular manifestations of religious practice. In this respect, each religion contributed to the infrastructure of the accumulated Korean tradition of religious pluralism.

If this is the case in terms of the Korean society and national culture, it is reasonable to expect that this layered formation is evident also in the lives of Korean people. To express this the other way round, given the varying political fortunes of the three religions, it would not be easy to explain the durability of Korean religious pluralism at the social and cultural levels without evidence that the religious experience of Korean people themselves is pluralistic, confirming in individual terms what is true of the Korean society as a whole.⁴⁵ For this reason, it is necessary to investigate the religious experience of the Korean people in the context of contemporary Korea.

C. The Korean Experience of Religious Plurality

The phenomenological analysis of Korea's three historic religious traditions is a useful way of describing the outlines of Korea's religious pluralism, but it does not reveal the experiential value of the religions themselves or their interaction in Korean culture and society.⁴⁶

The evidence of pragmatic ways in which Koreans engage in religious pluralism can be seen in several aspects of daily life. In terms of the basic religious experience, Koreans depend heavily on the practice of invoke God's blessings on routine aspects of life. This is one way in which *Mu* continues to exert widespread influence.

⁴⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 156.

⁴⁶ Chŏng Chinhong, *Chonggyo Munhwa ŭi Ihai* (종교문화의 이해, Understanding the Culture of Religion), 192.

Related to this, at the beginning of every year many Koreans take part in *Tojŏng Pigyŏl* (토정비결), which involves making predictions of coming events on the basis of a person's trigrams. The shrines of a tutelary deity can easily be seen in the countryside; fishermen do not leave ports without *gut* (굿, exorcism), and poles and statues signifying prayers for a good harvest and blessings are placed at the entrance of small towns. Furthermore, substantial numbers of Koreans still choose auspicious days for engagements, weddings, and moving.⁴⁷ These elements of *Mu* are woven into the fabric of popular Buddhism, with the result that Korean Buddhist rituals are more concerned with invoking blessings than with Buddhist religious practices. Similar tendencies are found with Korean Christianity, where the granting of blessings is an essential element of Christian worship rituals, and perhaps accounts in part for the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea. So it is very easy to identify the influence of *Mu* in everyday Korean life.

Along with this, Christians, Buddhists, and even non-believers carry on their life in typically Confucian ways. This is particularly evident in the family-centred and patriarchal ethos of Korean culture, in which the three cardinal virtues and five ethics of *Samgang Oryun* (삼강오륜, 三綱五倫)⁴⁸, and Confucian rituals of *Kwanhon Sangje* (관혼상제, 冠婚喪祭) – coming-of-age, marriage, funerals, and ancestor veneration – are observed.⁴⁹ Most Koreans have genealogical records of their descent group, the so-called *chokpo* (족보, 族譜), which back up Confucian ethics. In terms of everyday life, Korean society is dependent upon Confucian ideology and

⁴⁷ Ryu Tongsik, *Hanguk Chonggyo wa Kidoggyo* (한국 종교와 기독교, Korean Religions and Christianity), 187.

⁴⁸ The Three Cardinal Virtues are *kunwi singang* (군위신강, the rules between sovereign and subject), *puwi chagang* (부위자강, the rules between father and son), and *puwi pugang* (부위부강, the rules between husband and wife). *Oryun* is one of the basic ideas of Confucianism, and has been emphasised in Neo-Confucianism. The five basic relationships between human beings are as follows: *Kunsin yuui* (군신유의, the relationship between sovereign and subject); the subject should be loyal to the sovereign. *Puja yuch'in* (부자유친, the relationship between father and son); a son should show his parents every attention. *Pupu yubyŏl* (부부유별, the relationship between husband and wife); a wife should lead a chaste life. *Pung'u yusin* (붕우유신, the relationship between friends); friends should be sincere with each other. *Changyu yusŏ* (장유유서, the relationship between the elder and the younger); the younger should give precedence to the elder. It can hardly be denied that these ethics have highlighted allegiance, filial piety, sincerity, and respect for elders and chastity.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

the system stems that it imparts.

Beyond such observational evidence it must be asked: is there statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that Korean people understand their religious identity in synthetic terms of religious pluralism? Recent research based on quantitative analysis of Korean religious identity can help us answer this question.

The table below analyses the population of South Korea by religious breakdown, giving the number of adherents of each religion, and the percentage that each represents of the total population. The figures are based on the national census of 1983.⁵⁰

Table 2. Statistics on Religion in Korea (문공부:1983)⁵¹

Religion	Numbers	%
Buddhism	7,507,059	18.92
Protestantism	5,337,308	13.45
Roman Catholicism	1,590,625	4.01
Confucianism	786,955	1.99
Wŏnbulgyo ⁵²	96,333	0.24
Ch'ŏndogyo ⁵³	52,530	0.13
Etc.	216,809	0.55

⁵⁰ The figures are slightly different from contemporary figures, but are used for comparison with other figures collected in the identical period.

⁵¹ Yun Ihŭm, *Hanguk Chonggyo Yŏngu II* (한국종교 연구, The Study of Korean Religion), 218. These statistics were collected by the government, and are used to show the similarity between Yun's own result and the result of the official census.

⁵² Wŏn Buddhism was founded by Park Chungbin (박중빈) in 1916. It is a newly rising religion standing for practical Buddhism based on Buddhism.

⁵³ Ch'ŏndogyo (천도교, Religion of the Heavenly Way), formerly Tonghak (동학, Eastern Learning), Ch'ŏndogyo was established by Ch'oi Cheu (최제우) in 1860, after what he said was a direct inspiration from the Heavenly Emperor (Ch'ŏnju). It is an indigenous Korean religion that combines elements of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, shamanism, and Roman Catholicism. There is no concept of eternal reward in Ch'ŏndogyo, because its vision is limited to bringing righteousness and peace to the world. Toward this end, converts to Ch'ŏndogyo dedicate themselves to God by placing clean water on an altar in a ritual called *ch'ŏngsu* (청수). They are instructed to meditate on God, offer prayers (*kido*) upon leaving and entering their homes, dispel harmful thoughts (e.g., of greed and lust), and worship God in church on Sundays. The essence of Ch'ŏndogyo is said to be contained in a 21-word formula (*chumun*) that is recited as the way to enlightenment. It is translated: "May the creative power of the universe be within me in abundance. May heaven be with me and every creation will be done. Never forgetting this truth, everything will be known." This formula contains the basic principle of Ch'ŏndogyo: 'Man and God are one' (*In-Nae-Ch'ŏn*); this oneness is realised by individuals through sincere faith in the unity of their own body and spirit and through faith in the universality of God.

Total	15,587,619	
Whole Population (1983.10.1)	39,669,895	39.29

These figures indicate that 39.29% of the population of South Korea claim to belong to a particular religious group. This is broadly confirmed by the Korean Gallup survey of 1984, which reported that 43.8% of Koreans interviewed claimed to belong to a religious group (18.8% Buddhists; 22.2% Christians, 2.1% Confucian). Thus, it is reasonable to assume that about 40% of South Koreans regard themselves as religious people.

However, a leading Confucian scholar, Ko Pyŏngik,⁵⁴ has questioned these figures on grounds that they require a person to identify him or herself in terms of only one religion. He also argues that the criteria of identification apply only to a Western understanding of religion, based on the model of Christianity. Unlike Christianity, neither Confucianism nor Buddhism has any institutional ways of identifying their adherents, such as baptism or confirmation. Moreover neither Buddhism nor Confucianism make a distinction between believers and non-believers, since their teachings are concerned with humanity and human society as a whole.⁵⁵ As pointed out earlier, many Koreans who may not identify themselves Confucian in the sense of religious affiliation may nonetheless observe the Confucian rite of *chesa* (제사, 祭祀, ancestor memorial worship), and adopt Confucian customs and values in their family life. Ko Pyŏngik therefore contests that only approximately 2% of South Koreans are Confucian.⁵⁶

Testing Ko Pyŏngik's thesis, a leading social scientist of religion, Yun Ihŭm, has employed a different method of analysis, which substitutes a Western style of self-

⁵⁴ Ko Byŏngik, *Tong Asia ūi Chŏnt'ong gwa Pyŏnyong* (동아시아의 전통과 변용, Tradition and Transformation of East Asia) (Seoul: Munhak gwa Chisŏngsa, 1996), 280-289.

⁵⁵ Yun Ihŭm, *Hanguk Chonggyo Yŏngu II* (한국종교 연구, The Study of Korean Religion), 221.

⁵⁶ As a concrete example, filial piety is the most important ethic in the Korean family system and life, regardless of religion, and filial piety is the main feature of Neo-Confucianism, as seen earlier.

identification according to a particular religion, by a one-to-one interview that asks the people surveyed to discriminate between the categories of ‘conviction’ and ‘practice’ in terms of their religious identity. The following table shows the interesting results of his survey: the figures in the left column, relating to ‘conviction’ broadly confirming those of Table 2, while those of the middle column show a high percentage of Confucian ‘practice’ among all religions.

Table 3.

	No. of Self-Identified	Confucian disposition ⁵⁷	%
Buddhism	77 (19.3)	77	100
Protestantism	106 (26.5)	81	76.4
Roman Catholicism	20 (5.0)	18	90
Confucianism	2 (0.5)	2	100
Etc.	6 (1.5)	5	83.3
Non Believer	189 (47.2)	183	96.8
Total	400 (100 %)	367	91.7

This table clearly shows that the religious experience of Koreans is cumulative in the sense that whatever their self-identification in terms of religious ‘conviction’, they are all inclined to Confucian religious ‘practice’. Statistically, 90% of Catholics and 76.4% of Protestants in South Korea could be regarded as Confucians according to their disposition. In the case of Buddhists and non-believers, the figures are as high as 100%.

These figures convincingly demonstrate that individual Koreans maintain two or more religious leanings simultaneously.⁵⁸ It is reasonable, therefore, to describe a typical Korean as one who basically maintains Confucian rites in his or her life, irrespective of the religion to which he or she adheres in terms of religious creed. In other words, it is not unusual for a Korean to adhere to Buddhist notions, particularly

⁵⁷ This column is the result of the one-to-one interview method based on two basic categories, ‘conviction’ and ‘practice’, in Confucianism.

⁵⁸ Yun Ihŭm, *Hanguk Chonggyo Yŏngu II* (한국종교 연구, The Study of Korean Religion), 93-94.

the notion of the affinity bond, while accepting that love is the principle of life and the power of action as taught by Christianity, and turning to *Mu* to secure a blessing for the future.

D. Conclusion

On the basis of the historical and contemporary evidence examined in this chapter, it seems possible to confirm the hypotheses with which the chapter began. Religion in Korea has always been a plural phenomenon, comprising the three indigenous traditions of *Mu*, Korean Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism. While each of these religious traditions has a distinct history, especially in relation to the evolving Korean state, they have evolved a complex co-existence that enables Koreans to exercise a degree of religious pragmatism in selecting and amalgamating elements of each. In terms of philosophical expression, it produces a tendency in Korean thought to harmonise religious difference. Wŏnhyo and Chinul are two historical examples of this, and they represent a major tradition in Korean thought. Wŏnhyo's *Hwajeang* principle of seeking reconciliation among different doctrinal positions was not intended to suppress religious difference, but to capitalise on the intrinsic merits of each position through harmonisation. Sociologically this can be expressed in the image of 'layering' of one religious tradition upon another, provided that it is understood that this does not result in a hierarchy of religions. In contemporary Korea there is no such hierarchy, for no religion has a privileged status in the state. Each Korean is therefore able to relate to these religious traditions in philosophical and pragmatic ways, drawing from each what he or she sees valuable in terms of a personal or communal life style orientated toward the Ultimate. The statistical evidence that has been examined points to the fact that Koreans who identify themselves as belonging to a particular religion habitually inhabit the ethos of another, especially Confucianism.

Thus, individual Koreans interact with and internalise the accumulated structure of

Korean religions in everyday life, and these interactions are primary factors in the religious life of Koreans. If this is not understood, multi-religious experiences in the Korean context might be interpreted as syncretism or a dual religious system. But multi-religious experience itself is a characteristic of the local Korean context. This is essential for understanding the theology of Ryu Yŏngmo, who attempted to re-interpret Christianity in the context of Korean religious pluralism as the *sine qua non* of a local Christian theology.



Chapter Two. The Introduction of Christianity in a Multi-Religious Context

A. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the character of religious pluralism in Korea, concentrating on the three religious traditions that have shaped Korean culture over many centuries. This focus of attention in the present chapter is with Christianity which, by contrast to Korean shamanism, Korean Buddhism and Korean Neo-Confucianism, is a relative late-comer to the Korean religious scene. The chapter is not intended to offer a comprehensive overview of the history of Christianity in Korea since the eighteenth-century arrival of Catholicism and the arrival of Protestantism in the middle nineteenth century. This history has been extensively studied by other scholars. Rather, the aim of the chapter is to offer a comparative evaluation of the success and failure of Catholic and Protestant Christians, missionary and indigenous, in engaging with the religious pluralism of Korean culture.

To achieve this, the chapter will examine two inter-related issues: firstly, the means by which Catholic and Protestant Christianity were transmitted into Korea leading to the formation of Korean Christian communities; and secondly, the theological polarities that have arisen in Korean Christianity, especially Protestantism, which, it will be argued, are closely related to the issues of transmission. Theological polarity was partly caused by the transmission process. As a consequence, it was an already polarised form of Christianity that was challenged to insert itself into the layered structure of Korean religious pluralism. Insofar as Christianity failed to engage with religious pluralism, it remained and remains an extraneous religion to Korean religious culture. On the other hand, historical attempts to harmonise Christianity and other religions provide interesting precedents to the theological work of Ryu Yŏngmo.

The transmission of Christianity into Korea involved two aspects: Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The transmission of Roman Catholicism, initially by Koreans themselves, produced a fascinating, if short-lived, indigenisation of Christianity in the form of the so-called Confucian Christians,¹ who consciously sought to interpret Christianity in the context of the Korean religious pluralism of the Chosŏn era. This will be examined as a precedent for Ryu Yŏngmo, indicating that it is indeed possible to affirm religious pluralism without losing one's own religious identity. Ryu's more direct experience of transmitted Christian culture came, however, through his contact with Protestant Christianity which, for the most part, was transmitted in a way that set it in opposition to the religious pluralism of Korean culture.

Protestantism's early transmission into Korea fostered a theological polarity between the theology of missionaries on the one hand, and the instinct of Korean converts on the other, to develop a contextual foundation for Christianity. In general, the latter can be divided into two camps, conservative and liberal. Liberal theology can separate *minjung* (민중, 民衆) theology and the theology of religions. It is not difficult to discover the seriousness of the theological polarity in Korea and to see how it caused Korean theology to fragment. Since this theological polarity has impacted not only the theology of Ryu Yŏngmo but also the problems with which Korean theology is confronted at the present, it is worth examining this issue.

B. The Advent of Catholic Christianity

Christianity first encountered Korea through the missionary enterprise of Nestorian Christians from Central Asia between the fourth and tenth centuries. This was followed, in the later sixteenth century, by another brief encounter from Japan during

¹ This term appears in John H. Berthrong's work, *All under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (1991) in the West. However, in Korea many theologians have claimed, and in particular Sŏ Kwangsŏn insists, that "All Christians in Korea wear Confucian robes" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, Apr. 19. 1984). From this point of view, the researcher uses this term to indicate Christians who orient themselves by Confucian thought and tradition in the context of Korea.

Imjin Oeran (임진왜란) (1594). However, it was not until the early seventeenth century that Catholicism succeeded in finding a permanent footing in Korea. The fact that this took place in relatively recent history, well documented by reliable sources, means that it is possible to examine in detail the process by which a foreign religion was transmitted into Korean society, in contrast our the rather vaguer understanding, due to the distance of time and lack of historical documents, of the transmission of Buddhism and Confucianism.

1. The Formation of the Confucian-Christian Community

The term Confucian Christian means a member of a Christian community based on Confucian foundations.² It refers to the pluralist religious experience of people who are Christians and Confucians at the same time, without losing the essence of the two religious beliefs.³ The formation of plural identities can be found in the context of the transmission of Christianity to Korea.

Catholic Christianity was first introduced to Korea in the form of Western Studies. These were not confined to the study of religion in a narrow sense, but included knowledge of Western sciences and philosophy as components of Western intellectual culture.⁴ This new learning was particularly attractive to one of the schools of Confucian thought in the Chosŏn era of the seventeenth century, when Korean Confucianism was internally fragmented into several rival movements. *Sirhak* (실학, 實學), the school of 'Practical Learning', advocated the renewal of practical Confucian knowledge in order to solve the intellectual problems of the time. This was in contrast to idealist modes of Neo-Confucianism, which tended to debate theoretical issues to the neglect of practical application. In light of the experience of two devastating wars in the Japanese invasion of 1492-1598 (*Imjin Oeran*), and the

² In this section, Christianity indicates Roman Catholic Christianity, and members of this will be referred to as Christians.

³ Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ūi Chŏngye* (한국기독교사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea) (Seoul: Hanguk Kidoggyo Asia yonguwŏn, 1989), 18.

⁴ Western Studies indicates all things from the West, and Koreans called it this simply because it is located to the west of Korea geographically. Later, Eastern Studies, a new religion in reaction to this, was brought into Korea.

Chinese invasion from Manchuria in 1636 (*Pyŏngja Horan* (병자호란, 丙子胡亂)) the *Sirhak* movement took the position that intellectualism had weakened the foundations of Confucian society, and that metaphysical arguments among intellectuals disregarded the needs of people's lives and rendered the country incapable of withstanding external invasion.

Sirhak Confucians were committed to providing guidance for actual problems confronting Korean society in the political, economic and social spheres. They studied patterns of land ownership and distribution to discover ways of alleviating the poverty that afflicted Korean villages; others also began to invent military arms to offer protection from outsiders' attacks. But Neo-Confucian philosophy could not provide effective intellectual undergirding for these endeavours in social development.⁵ For example, traditional Confucian thought had a fixed system of social stratification, the so-called social classes: *yangban* (양반, 兩班), *chungin* (중인, 中人), *sangmin* (상민, 常民), and *ch'ŏnmin* (천민, 賤民). The *yangban* were civil or military elites by the beginning of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) of Chosŏn Korea. The *chungin* acted as links between the ruling *yangban* and the common people and were sometimes related to *yangban* through secondary marriages. The *sangmin* were commoners, and the *ch'ŏnmin* were a parish class. This social stratification was based on Confucian values that allowed only limited social mobility.⁶ It was therefore difficult for Korean society to accommodate the emergence of a *bourgeoisie* of family industry workers and traders that had not previously existed in the Confucian social order. Faced by these problems, Confucian scholars developed various options: some tried to restore primitive Confucianism with its emphasis on social ethics in place of Neo-Confucianism; others, like the *Sirhak* Confucians, looked to Western Studies as a new source of scientific knowledge and techniques, a worldview different and attractive enough to

⁵ Kim Youngho, "Reevaluation of Sirhak", *Re-illumination of Korean History* (Seoul: Minsungsa, 1986), 364.

⁶ Yun Sasun, "Background of Thoughts and Arising of Sirhak", *Profound Studies of Korean Thoughts* (Seoul: Usik, 1983), ed. by Lee Ul-ho, 399-400.

draw their attention. In the name of Western Studies, a number of Christian books were transmitted. These naturally stirred up religious interest on the basis of Confucianism, and finally a religious community formed. Although there is some discussion among historians as to the dating of the first Confucian Christian community, there is no doubt that it was closely associated with the work of the Confucian scholar, Yi Pyök (李蘖, 1754-1786).⁷

In 1779, the *Ch'önjinam Chuosa* (천진암 주어사) seminar was held at Aengja Mountain in Kyöggido Kwangju province with Kwön Ch'ölsin⁸ as the central figure. In this seminar, a number of Confucians, including Yi Pyök, researched and discussed various philosophical and cosmological issues raised by Western Studies on the basis of Confucian scriptures.⁹ At this stage Christianity was discussed not as a religion *per se*, but as a philosophy. In other words, this seminar set out to discuss and research metaphysical or philosophical aspects of Christianity rather than sharing and expressing the faith or belief of Christians. Nonetheless, when the seminar concluded, Yi Pyök composed a poem entitled 'Reverence of God' (*Ch'önju Konggyöngga*, 천주공경가, 天主恭敬歌).¹⁰ Thus, it appears that the seminar, though concerned with intellectual problems, saw the nascence also of the first Confucian Christian community.

After the seminar one of Yi Pyök's colleagues, Yi Sünghun, visited Peking where he had a direct exposure to Christian beliefs and practices through his encounter with Jesuit missionaries. He was baptised in 1784 by Louis de Grammont, and returned to Korea with a collection of Christian books and religious artefacts.¹¹ These added

⁷ He played a leading role in the formation of the Confucian Christian community. For details see Ri Söngbae, *Yugyo wa Kurisüdogyo* (유교와 그리스도교, Confucianism and Christianity) (Waegwan: Benedict Press, 1985).

⁸ Kwön Ch'ölsin (1736-1801) was one of the best Confucians at that time.

⁹ The reasons why Yi Pyök attended the seminar, and the characteristics of the seminar are revealed well in a book by Charles Dallet, *History of the Korean Church [Histoire de l'Eglise de Core]*, Vol. 1 (Seoul: Institute of Korean Catholic History, 1990), trans. by Choi Sökwoo, 14-15.

¹⁰ Ha Söngrae, "Sibgyemyöngga wa Ch'önju gongyöngga (십계명가와 천주공경가, Song of the Decalogue and the reverence of Heavenly Lord)", *Sinhak chönmang*, No. 23 (Kwangju: Catholic University Press, 1973), 156-170.

¹¹ Yu Hongryöl, *Hanguk Ch'önjugyohoesa* (한국 천주 교회사, History of Korean Catholic Church)

greatly to the knowledge of the nascent Confucian Christian community in Korea. Yi Pyŏk himself accepted the truth of Christianity, but in so doing he sought to integrate his understanding of Christian theology with Confucian thought, as it were, ‘layering’ Christianity upon Confucianism. Ri Sŏngbae states Yi Pyŏk’s theological tendency as follows:

The Christian theology of Yi Pyŏk follows faithfully the best and the most ideal teachings of Confucianism, and simultaneously develops them and consolidates them into Christianity. Apart from a short poem, *Ch’ŏnju Konggyŏngga* (천주공경가, 天主恭敬歌), *Sŏnggyo yoji* (성교요지, 聖敎要旨, The Purport of Sacred Religion) shows how it is possible to combine the revealed religion of Christianity with Confucianism without any conflicts or contradictions between them. In other words, he succeeds in incorporating Christian views of cosmology and ontology based on the supernatural revelation of God into the realistic ethics and rites of Confucianism, and furthermore provides a firm fountainhead which lets people accept, praise and respect the Christian God through Confucian practices.¹²

Consider part of Yi Pyŏk’s poem, *Ch’ŏnju konggyŏngga*, to see how he integrated Christianity and Confucian thought.

There are elders in a family,
There is a king in a country.
There is spirit in my body,
And there is God in Heaven.

To show respect to parents,
To be loyal to the king.
Let’s keep *Samgang Oryun*,¹³
To adore God is the prime thing.¹⁴

Judging by this, Yi Pyŏk understood the Christian God on the basis of Confucian ethical values. The *Samgang Oryun* to which the poem refers are the ethical disciplines that govern human relations, *Samgang* (삼강, 三綱) denotes the three

(Seoul: Catholic Press, 1962), 17.

¹² Ri Sŏngbae, *Yugyo wa Kurisūdogyo* (유교와 그리스도교, Confucianism and Christianity) 153.

¹³ See foot note 48 in Chapter 1, page 46.

¹⁴ Ha Sŏngrae, “Sipgyemyŏngga wa Ch’ŏnju Konggyŏngga (십계명가와 천주공경가, a Hymn of Ten Commandments and a Hymn of Adoration for God)”, *Chŏnmang* (전망), no.24, 1973 winter, 156-170.

fundamental principles of allegiance between sovereign and subject, father and son, and husband and wife. *Oryun* (오륜, 五倫) are the five ethical disciplines in human relations: loyalty to the sovereign (*Kunsin yuui*, 군신유의, 君臣有義); respect for one's parents (*Puja yuch'in*, 부자유친, 父子有親); respect between husband and wife (*Pupu yubyol*, 부부유별, 夫婦有別); sincerity among friends (*Pung'u yusin*, 붕우유신, 朋友有信); precedence for elders (*Changyu yusŏ*, 장유유서, 長幼有序).

The strongly ethical emphasis in Yi Pyŏk's thought reminds us that the *Sirhak* movement to which he belonged was concerned primarily with the ethical reform of Confucianism, their aim being to overcome the real social problems of their day rather than bringing institutional changes to Confucianism.¹⁵ Yi Pyŏk took the view that Catholic rites were compatible with Confucians rituals, as in the following quotation:

Burn incense and prepare wine, light a candle and sit beside it, and confess with compassion, what holy blood!¹⁶

Burning incense, preparing wine and lighting a candle are steps in the Confucian ritual of ancestor worship, but he confesses that it is Jesus' blood that is holy. In other words, he interpreted Christianity on the basis of Confucian views, and the belief of their community was grounded on the religious rituals and salvation of Christianity.¹⁷ They were still Confucians but they also put their beliefs into practice through Christianity.

These time-honoured principles constituted the moral context of Yi Pyŏk's adoption and adaptation of Christianity, his enthusiasm for which inspired many people from

¹⁵ Ch'a Sŏnghwan, *Hanguk Chonggyo ūi Sahoehakjŏk Ihae* (한국종교사상의 사회학적 이해, A Social Understanding of Korean Religious Thoughts) (Seoul: Munhak kwa Chisongsa, 1992), 134.

¹⁶ Ha Sŏngrae, "Sipgyemyŏngga wa Ch'ŏnju Konggyŏngga (십계명가와 천주공경가, a Hymn of Ten Commendments and a Hymn of Adoration for God)", 169.

¹⁷ Ch'a Sŏnghwan, *Hanguk Chonggyo ūi Sahoehakjŏk Ihae* (한국종교사상의 사회학적 이해, A Social Understanding of Korean Religious Thoughts), 135.

different social strata, such as *Yangban* and *Chungin* into forming a believers' group. They met to study and worship each seventh day. Even though there was no priest or preacher, the group continued to maintain Christian belief and religious practices through regular meetings, and this marked the beginning of a Confucian Christian community in Korea.¹⁸

In his study of local theology, Schreiter interprets¹⁹ the Confucian Christian community in Korea as a model of religious indigenisation. While this definition is understandable in terms of Schreiter's interest in the capacity of Christianity to shed the characteristics of one culture and adopt those of another, he pays insufficient attention to the religious character of Korean Confucianism. Yi Pyŏk was not simply adapting Western Catholicism to Confucian culture. His significance lies in the fact that he was recasting both religions, and their ethical teaching, within the Korean context of religious pluralism. He was not passing a judgement on the superiority of one religion over the other. Rather, illustrating what we argued in Chapter 1 to be typical of Korean experience, he was 'layering' Christianity upon Confucian ethics and rites, in a manner which re-interpreted the religious element of Western learning in the context of Korean religious pluralism. The fact that the members of this nascent Confucian-Christian community made initially no attempt to assume institutional forms, but simply studied the Christian scriptures without the help of a priest or missionary, indicates that they were not interested in establishing a new denomination of Christianity, but in putting religious beliefs into practice on the grounds of creative Confucian interpretation of Christianity.

2. The Transformation of the Confucian-Christian Community

This creative situation was not to last, however, due to institutional forces of religious separation that pressed upon the nascent Confucian-Christian community from outside itself.

¹⁸ C. Dallet, *History of the Korean Church [Histoire de l'Eglise de Core]*, Vol. 1, 302.

¹⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2.

Difficulties began when, around 1787, the community made overtures to the Roman Catholic Bishop in Peking asking complicated theological questions, including questions about Christian rituals and orders. If this shows that the community was developing and maturing as a stable organisation, and was searching for theological satisfaction in both qualitative and quantitative terms, it also points up the danger of a local theology becoming dependent on recourses outside its own context. Inadvertently the nascent community was opening the door to control and re-definition by the Roman Catholic authorities in Peking. At the same time the community ran into problems with the Confucian hierarchy in the Chosŏn state. In a manner that is analogous to their attempt to suppress Korean *Mu* from the official life of the court, they opposed the reforming influence of the Confucian-Christian community.

The issue that provoked the controversy between Confucian officialdom and the Confucian Christian community was that of funerary rites. In 1791, the mother of one of the community members, Yun Chich'ung (윤지충, 尹持忠), died. Yun and his cousin Kwŏn Sangyŏn (권상연, 權尙然) buried Yun's mother according to Confucian funeral rites, but burned her tablet and did not offer a sacrifice to the deceased woman according to Confucian teachings. This led to their arrest and execution on the orders of the Confucian officials, on the grounds that ancestor worship, sacrificial rites, and ancestral tablets are at the heart of Confucian rituals and constitute the ritual core of the basic virtue of filial piety (*hyo*, 孝, 孝). To abandon ancestral sacrifice and to burn the ancestral tablet was regarded as a frontal challenge to Confucian morals, virtues, and social mandates.²⁰ As a result, King Sunjo (1790-1834) passed a law in 1801, and King Hŏnjong (1827-1849) passed a law in 1839, that prohibited Christianity.²¹ Persecution of the Confucian-Christian community followed: around three hundred of its members were executed on the

²⁰ Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ŭi Chŏngae* (한국 기독교 사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea), 14.

²¹ The first promulgation of official prohibition was made on 10th September 1801, and the second was passed on 18th October 1839.

first promulgation of prohibition;²² on the second a further sixty-nine people were killed and forty-eight were severely punished.²³

These tragic events spurred the Confucian-Christian community on to transform itself. Firstly, the make-up of the community changed. The founding members who were basically Confucians seceded from the community,²⁴ and the *chungin* class became dominant within the community. Affirmatively, the Confucian-Christian community started to expand from the ruling class of *yangban* to the commoners, including the *chungin*. Members of the Confucian-Christian community who came from different classes began to co-operate, thus making possible wider missionary expansion.

Secondly, the Roman Catholics in Peking advised the community not to try to retain Confucian ancestral rites and tablets. The Chinese Catholics experienced similar problems of relationship with Confucians in China, and the Catholic authorities forbade the adoption of Chinese Confucian rites. These limitations contradicted the original intentions of the *Sirhak* Confucians, with the result that those members of the community who wished to continue to integrate Christianity and Confucianism had to go underground while the community was dispersed at the public level.²⁵

A Roman Catholic priest, Chu Munmo (周文謨, ?-1801), was appointed to the community from China in 1794 and set about redefining its characteristics according to Catholic dogma. Finally, in 1831, the transformed community came fully under

²² At this time, the total community amounted to about ten thousand.

²³ These are the numbers reported to the headquarters of the government, so it is safe to assume that the actual number executed or punished is much larger, including the number of martyrs in each province. For details of numbers and the history of martyrdom in Korea, see Hyon Sŏngmun, *Kihae ilki* (기해일기), *Diary of Kihae Year* (Seoul: Minwasudang, 1905).

²⁴ The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol. 1 (Seoul: The Christian Literature Press, 1989), 81.

²⁵ Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ŭi Chŏngae* (한국기독교사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea), 20

the control of Roman Catholics in China.²⁶

The transformation of the Confucian-Christian community ended this experiment in the integration of Confucianism and Christianity. These two religions were alienated from each other, and policies of theological and cultural exclusivism prevailed. As a result, Christianity failed to infiltrate the layered structure of Korean religious pluralism. This does not annul, however, the value of the Confucian-Christian community in terms of the paradigm it represents. It provides a stepping-stone for Christian engagement with other religions, showing how it is possible for Christianity to insert itself into the culture of religious pluralism in Korea. It also underlines that the local theology represented by the Confucian-Christian community needs to be respected as such – a local theology that should not be constrained or controlled by theological authorities elsewhere, or by the power of the political state. These conditions recognised, this early initiative in Confucian-Christian community formation is a valuable indigenous example of the paradigm of religious pluralism in Korean Christian theology that continues to offer hope for theology of Korean Christianity in relation to Korean Buddhism and Korean Confucianism.

C. The Introduction of Protestant Christianity

1. The Formation of Protestant Churches

Protestantism was introduced into Korea in the late nineteenth century, in the heyday of Western colonisation that sought to penetrate ‘the Hermit Kingdom’ of Korea. The Chosŏn state was undergoing abrupt changes in terms of politics, culture, and mentality. In its attempt to transform itself into a modern society, Chosŏn Korea opened itself to Western colonialism which resulted in a national crisis. Under these difficult circumstances, as Yang Hyŏnhye has pointed out, there was an urgent need to reconstruct the national identity in political terms, and Korean religions needed to

²⁶ The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol.1, 96.

play their full part in this enterprise.²⁷

Protestantism was regarded as a new hope which could satisfy these urgent needs. Many Koreans hoped that Protestantism could adjust to the layered structure of Korean religious pluralism and thus satisfy the characteristics of Korean thought.

It is important to note that, before the first Protestant missionaries set foot in Korea, some parts of the Bible had already been translated into Korean, and substantive mission work had been done through the distribution of these translated scriptures. In the meantime, Yi Sujöng (1842-1886) was baptized in Japan and engaged in Protestant missionary work, including Bible translation, among Korean students in Japan. In other words, the groundwork for Protestantism was prepared even before the Western missionaries arrived. As Underwood points out, when the missionaries landed in Korea for the first time, they found the seed already sown, and they were able to gather nuts.²⁸

The first missionaries in Korea were the Presbyterians H. N. Allen (who arrived in 1884) and H.G. Underwood, and the Methodists H. G. Appenzeller and Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Scranton (who arrived in 1885).²⁹ Other denominational churches in many Western countries started to send missionaries to Korea. For instance, the Presbyterian church of the United States, the Presbyterian church of Canada, the Presbyterian church of Australia, the Methodist church of the United States, the Seventh Day Adventists of the United Kingdom, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Baptist church all established their own mission bureaus and sent missionaries.³⁰ The majority of the missionaries, however, came from the United States. Statistical evidence indicates that by 1920, 267 of the 343 missionaries in Korea – about three

²⁷ Yang Hyönhye, *Yun Ch'ihwa wa Kim Kyosin* (윤치호와 김교신, Yun Ch'ihwa and Kim Kyosin) (Seoul: Hanul, 1994), 13.

²⁸ H. G. Underwood, *Call of Korea* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908), 136.

²⁹ Their specialities were medicine and education. Allen was officially a doctor of the legation, and other missionaries started to do their missionary works through a hospital. Ryu Tongsik, *Kidogyo Sasangsa*, 213.

³⁰ The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol.1, 190-191.

quarters of the total – were US citizens.

Since Western religions were strictly prohibited in Chosŏn Korea, early missionary work necessarily centred on medical and educational care by missionary doctors and educators.³¹ It was natural that most missionary work, including modifying Bible translations and publishing hymns, documents on dogma, and other periodicals, was carried out through legal hospitals and schools. Through these activities, the missionaries tried to dispel the Koreans' negative image of Western colonialism. By 1888, full-scale missionary work had begun, each of the denominational missions concentrating its work in a separate region. Consequently, different churches developed rapidly in different regions, and inter-denominational competition was drawn along geographical lines, at the expense of building an indigenous and independent church. The end result was the transplantation of different Western denominations into Korea. The tendency to adhere to each denomination continued for over thirty years. It provided a bone of contention between ecclesiastical authorities and became a cause of church schism.³² In addition, church schisms strengthened the denominational characteristics of each church.³³

The political and social situation at this time in Korea was unstable because of the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) and Russian-Japanese War (1903-4). The work of the Protestant churches benefited by the extra-territorial status they were accorded. This enabled them to provide humanitarian support for refugees and other Koreans who were caught up in the political turbulence, and this increased the attractiveness of Protestantism. The number of Methodist and Presbyterian churches increased from six hundred to four thousand during the Sino-Japanese War, and to seventy thousand

³¹ At the governmental level, the strict prohibition of Western religions is clear from the confession of Yi Sujŏng, "If I were in my own country, I should be killed for my religion." In addition, Son Ponggu who was converted by Yi Sujŏng, stated "I am also ready to die if Yi Sujŏng is executed because of his religion." H. Loomis, "Corea Open to The Gospel", *The Missionary Review*, Nov., 1883, 418.

³² The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol. 1, 218.

³³ Min Kyongbae, *Hanguk Kidoggyohoesa* (개정판 한국기독교회사, New edition of the History of Korean Church) (Seoul: Taehan Kidoggyo ch'ulp'ansa, 1982), 135.

during the Russian-Japanese War.³⁴ For this reason, Protestantism succeeded in attracting the intellectuals of the age.³⁵ The national crisis deepened when Korea was colonised by Japan in 1910.³⁶ The Presbyterian Assembly, under the name of *Chosŏn Yesugyo Changrohoe Ch'onghoi* (조선 예수교 장로회 총회), was organised in 1912, and Annual Methodist Conferences took place in 1908 and 1918. Consequently, Protestant churches were moving toward national status and respect in Korea.

2. The Characteristics of Early Protestantism in Korea

The early promise that Protestantism represented in the estimation of many Koreans at a time of national crisis failed to be realised, however, as it became clear that the Protestant leadership, controlled by Western missionaries and by the denominational churches from which they came, was unwilling to identify with the political aspirations of the Korean people. This became evident in two important events in the early twentieth century which provoked an anti-Protestant backlash among Korean nationalists: the Revitalisation Movement of 1907, and the 1st March Independence Movement of 1919.

The Revitalisation Movement, more commonly referred to as Revivalism, originated in the prayer meetings that the missionaries had instituted, and first expressed itself as a co-ordinated movement at the revival meeting at the Changdaehyŏn Church of Pyŏngyang in January 1907. With missionary support, the Korean evangelist Kil Sŏnju (길선주, 1869-1935) led full-scale revival meetings all over the country.³⁷

³⁴ S. A. Moffett's Letter to Dr. Ellinwood, Nov. 1, 1894.

³⁵ C. E. Sharp, "Motives for Seeking Christ", *The Korea Mission Field*, Vol. 2, No. 10, Aug., 1906, 182-183.

³⁶ The colonisation of Korea by Japan was by agreement between Japan and the United States. If the United States allowed Japan to take over Korea, they obtained the right to take over the Philippines through the 'Taft Secret Treaty' with Japan in July 1905. At the same time, the United Kingdom concluded an alliance with Japan which said that Japan took over Korea. Yogsahak Yŏnguso, *Kwangjwa Hanguk Kunhyŏndaesa* (강좌 한국 근현대사, Lectures on Modern Korean History) (Seoul: P'ulpit, 1999), 69.

³⁷ These revival meetings were reported as a Pentecostal experience to the World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910. World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission I*, Edinburgh, 1910, 77-80.

These revival meetings encouraged many Koreans to convert and to experience Christianity in terms of evangelical piety.³⁸

Despite its positive humanitarian contribution, the missionaries insisted that the Revitalisation Movement should be strictly non-political. They justified this as a means of protecting the Protestant churches from Japanese reprisal.³⁹ Rather than risking the revival by any sort of political involvement, they emphasised that its only legitimate objective was the conversion of souls.⁴⁰

Thus, 'The Great Crusade to Win One Million Souls from Heathenism to Christianity' was launched in 1909, about which the missionary J. S. Gale wrote:

This movement needs a special effort in Korea. The demand for salvation of 'One Million Souls' is reverberating through the whole country when national disappointment reaches its peak. Owing to their own fault, the Korean people lost self-defence and independent politics, became a contemptible race, and forfeited their national sovereignty, and right of enactment. This country that has lost everything is looking for a savior. Today is the day. We can neither wait nor prophesy tomorrow. Today is the day to save a soul, and this country is the place to be saved. There are a number of Koreans with a modest attitude in front of the gate of our missionary work. We, missionaries, believe that this time is a most critical stage for Korea.⁴¹

This provides the clearest possible evidence that the missionaries saw the political and social crises of Korea as a golden chance to evangelise the nation with the promise of a spiritual saviour. In other words, aware as they were of the political aspirations of the country, they chose a non-political option for their Christian witness. While this certainly reflected the kind of theology that they brought from the

³⁸ Kim Yongbok claims that this gap between missionaries and Koreans was the gap between the middle class of the West and the low class of Chosŏn Korea. Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ūi Chŏngae* (한국기독교사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea), 40.

³⁹ After the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1905, the Koreans agreed to run the Japanese out of Korea by raising Korean crusaders, but missionaries took a strong stand against it (The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol. 1, 276).

⁴⁰ See Park Sunkyŏng, *Minjok T'ongil kwa Kiddoggyo* (민족통일과 기독교, Unification of Korea and Christianity) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1986).

⁴¹ J. S. Gale, *The Missionary*, Vol. 43, No. 5, May, 1910, 213.

West, with a firm distinction between gospel and law, between spiritual truth and mundane affairs, between religion and politics, they were at the same time willing to exploit a political crisis for spiritual ends. In so doing, however, they brought upon themselves the criticism of many Korean nationalists who found their expectations of Protestantism to be frustrated. In the words of Park Sunkyŏng, Christianity was revealing itself, in the words of Marx, as an ‘opium of the people’ the effect of which was to acquiesce to the colonial policy of Japan. Historical research into this period has shown that the missionaries were indeed influenced by the diplomatic manoeuvring of Japan, with additional pressure from missionary headquarters in the United States.⁴²

For example, when a volunteer army rose in rebellion against Japanese colonialism, the missionaries declared against it officially and denounced it as “a mad sort of spurious patriotism”.⁴³ In addition, they encouraged the central Korean leader of the revival, Kil Sŏnju, to persuade people that “all power is provided by God”, and that any resistance to established order is an infringement of Pauline teaching about respecting political authority.⁴⁴ As a result, the non-political stance of the Revival separated Protestantism and national movements, with the result that most Koreans who had a sense of national consciousness left the Protestant churches.⁴⁵

This trend was compounded by the 1st March Independence Movement of 1919. This marked the apex of the Korean nationalist movement in Korea against Japanese colonialism, and was the largest demonstration of popular non-violent resistance in the history of the nation. Based on the principle of self-determination proclaimed by Thomas Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) at the end of the First World War, an eloquent declaration of Korean independence was drafted by the Korean nationalist Ch’oi Namsŏn, and signed by thirty-three ‘representatives of the Korean people’. It

⁴² The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol. 1, 304.

⁴³ J. S. Gale, *Korea in Transition*, 38-39.

⁴⁴ *The Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.*, 1908, 269.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

was read aloud at a large gathering of students in Seoul's Pagoda Park at noon on the 1st March. This was a signal for the beginning of a nationwide demonstration that mobilised men and women of all ages and social backgrounds. Although it failed to achieve its stated aim of Korean independence, the impact of the 1st March Movement was profound and long-lasting.

Of critical importance for the subject of this thesis, the 1st March Movement was organised in the name of religious solidarity,⁴⁶ and brought together Korean Christians with Buddhists, Confucians and others in a common commitment to national independence.⁴⁷

Interpreting the significance of the 1st March Movement in terms of the people's struggle for independence, Kim Yongbok argues that "the language that controlled the movement is not either a traditional Confucian language or Western missionary's language, but the language of Chosŏn *minjung* and a historic expression of suppressed *minjung*".⁴⁸ This term Kim employs is not only a Confucian word but also the accumulated religious experience of Koreans. In other words, *minjung* is a symbolised term of ceaseless interactions between different religions in Korea. Thus, the multi-religious experiences of Korea are contained in this term, and it is not a term for a certain religion but inclusive language which fully embraces multi-religious experiences.

After the failure of the 1st March Movement, Protestantism was confronted with anti-Protestantism because of its ambiguous attitude toward national crises and movements. The anti-Protestantism sentiment criticised Protestantism for being at

⁴⁶ Among the thirty-three representatives of the people, there were sixteen Christians, two Buddhists, and fifteen persons of Ch'ŏndogyo. For details about the representative members, see Mun Inhyŏn, "3.1 undong kwa Kaesingyo chidoja yŏngu (3.1운동과 개신교 지도자 연구, Study of the 1st March Movement of 1919 and leaders of Protestantism)", *Sach'ong* (사충), Vol. 20, 1976.

⁴⁷ More than two million Koreans took part in this movement; 7,979 were executed, 15,961 injured, and 46,948 arrested. Yŏgsahak Yŏnguso, *Kwangjwa Hanguk Kŭnhyŏndaesa* (강좌 한국 근현대사, Lectures on Modern Korean History), 134.

⁴⁸ Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ŭi Chŏngae* (한국기독교사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea), 85.

the beck and call of imperialism and tolerant of the Japanese occupation of Korea, these aberrations being justified in the name of God and the Bible.⁴⁹ Consequently, in 1925 the anti-Protestant movement branded Protestantism as ‘superstition’, ‘religion of the devil’, and ‘outwardly a sheep, inwardly a wolf’.⁵⁰

3. The Missionaries’ Attitude to Korean Culture

The missionaries’ policy of non-politicisation which resulted in their refusal to permit the Protestant churches to identify with the cause of Korean nationalism found its corollary in the missionaries’ refusal to allow Christianity to identify with Korean culture. Coming as the majority of missionaries did from the national and cultural background of the United States, it is perhaps inevitable that their basic attitude toward Korean culture should have reflected their American cultural bias. The words that they most commonly used to describe Korean culture were ‘heathen’ and ‘heathenish’.⁵¹ There was no question in their minds that Korean culture was deeply inferior to that of the West, and of the New World in particular.⁵² They firmly believed that it was part of their responsibility as American missionaries to eradicate such heathenism by Christianising Korean culture and civilising it according to the cultural standards of their own American civilisation.⁵³ It is thus hard to deny that the operative theory of Christian mission was grounded in a sense of cultural superiority.

Overseas missions by the United States Christians began with the American victory

⁴⁹ Kang Ingyu, “1920 nyöndae pan Kidoggyo undongül t’onghaebon Kidoggyo (1920년대 반 기독교 운동을 통해본 기독교, Christianity through anti-Christianity movement in 1920)”, *Hanguk Kidoggyosa yöngu* (한국기독교사 연구, Study of Korean Christian History), Vol. 9, 1986, 13-14.

⁵⁰ Kang Wöndon, “Hanguk minjok minju undong e pich’uö pon Hanguk Kidoggyo (한국민족민주운동에 비추어 본 한국 기독교, Korean Christianity light on Korean people’s democratic movements)”, *Sinhak sasang*, vol. 60, 1988, 14-15. About this situation, J.S. Ryang states that Protestant churches face a crisis in Korea, and most Koreans take a negative attitude towards Protestants. J. S. Ryang, “The Aims of Methodist Union in Korea”, *The Korean Mission Field*, 1927. 7, 152.

⁵¹ Sö, Kwangsön, “T’al Chonggyo wa minjung üisik (탈종교와 민중의식, De-religion and minjung consciousness)”, in Cho, Myönggi et. al., *Hanguk Sasang üi Simch’üing* (한국사상의 심층, The Depth of Korean Thought), 520-537.

⁵² Yun Söngböm, *Kidoggyo wa Hanguk Sasang* (기독교와 한국사상, Christianity and Korean Thoughts) (Seoul: Taehan Kidoggyo söhoe, 1963), 84.

⁵³ Lee Manyöl, *Hanguk Kidoggyo wa Minjok Üisik* (한국기독교와 민족의식, Korean Christianity and Consciousness of a People) (Seoul: Chisik sanöbsa, 1991), 492-493.

in the Mexican War of 1848. In popular American interpretation this marked the victory of the new over the old, of Protestantism over Catholicism with its admixture of traditional Amer-Indian culture, and of American cultural values. This fired the confidence of the new missionary organisations that came into being following the war. ‘The American Inter-Seminary Alliance’ and ‘Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions’ were organised and sent many missionaries to different parts of the world, including Chosŏn Korea.⁵⁴ With them they brought their conviction in the cultural superiority of the United States. Accordingly, Korean Christians were taught that to become a Christian meant to be westernised, and they too began to consider Korean culture as inferior and heathenish.

This kind of cultural thinking was supported by the theological tendency of the American missionaries. Brown shows that this was thoroughly influenced by New England Puritanism. This was conservative in its biblical theology, uncritically acceptive of Adventism and Millenarianism, and deeply opposed to any form of liberal theology that was considered rank heresy.⁵⁵ Kim Kyosin argues that the American Protestantism that was imported to Korea not only tolerated racism, but lacked spiritual depth and reverence in terms of the original nature of Christianity.⁵⁶ Consequently, in his judgement, Protestantism in Chosŏn Korea failed to distinguish between primitive biblical Christianity and its later elaboration in Western society and culture. For example, to judge the success of missionary work according to offerings, believer mobilisation for religious events, or the size of the church is far removed from the church of the New Testament, and in fact projects a materialist understanding of religion under the guise of a non-political spiritual teaching.⁵⁷ Against this background the character of American Protestant mission in Chosŏn Korea has been likened to that of a lifeboat to the sinking ship of Korean culture.

“Thus the duty of churches is to rescue as many people as possible, and this rescue

⁵⁴ Paik Nakchun, *Hanguk Kaesinyosa* (한국개신교사, History of Korean Protestantism) (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1973), 101-102. On average, missionaries were in their early twenties.

⁵⁵ A. J. Brown, *Mastery of the Far East*, 540.

⁵⁶ Publishing Society of Kim Kyosin’s complete works, *Kim Kyosin’s complete works*, vol. 5, 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 126-132.

work is based on the enthusiastic hope about the Advent of Christ and rebuilding His kingdom in this world.”⁵⁸ Yet this theological tendency had a great influence on the development of the Korean church, especially its middle-class members. The fact that the missionaries’ own class background made it difficult for them to communicate with the Korean *minjung* imposed a limit on the degree to which they influenced the Korean people, and this arguably left a void that Korean Christians have themselves been able to fill. It explains why many Koreans and the intellectuals of the age felt increasingly alienated from Protestantism, which failed to satisfy their own religious instincts and bequeathed them with a set of theological views and language which they would be challenged to overcome.

D. The Polarities within Indigenous Korean Protestantism

The polarity of theology in Korea reveals both the characteristics and the problems of Korean theology. It shows not only the internal structure of Korean theology but also the urgent necessity for an integrated theology to transform this structure. It will be argued that an investigation of the polarity of theology in the Korean church will yield an appropriate theology for a situation of religious pluralism.

1. Conservative Theology and Liberal Theology

Missionary theology was the absolute standard of early Protestantism in Chosŏn Korea. The fundamentalist character of this theology meant that its dogmatic positions were firmly fixed and excluded concepts that did not conform to its principles. Influential as this kind of theology was in the nascence of Korean Protestant theology, the maturation of Korean theology developed along rather more flexible lines. In his analysis of the theology of the Korean church in the 1930s, Ryu Tongsik identifies two main streams which flowed from the agreed premise that the Bible is the primary reference point of theological discourse:⁵⁹ conservative and

⁵⁸ Paik Nakchun, *Hanguk Kaesingyosa* (한국개신교사, History of Korean Protestantism), 425.

⁵⁹ Ryu Tongsik, “Kidoggyo sasangsa (기독교사상사, History of Christian thought)”, *Hanguk Chonggyo Sasangsa* (한국종교사상사, History of Korean Religious Thoughts) (Seoul: Yŏnsei University Press, 1992), 239-240.

liberal theologies.

Conservative theologians believed that the theological orientation of the early missionaries should be maintained as the foundation of the Korean church. The leading advocate of such conservatism was Park Hyŏngryong (1897-1978). He studied at Princeton Theological Seminary in the middle 1920s, where he espoused the principles of Christian fundamentalism, particularly the literal interpretation and absolute adherence to the scriptures, the imminent and physical second coming of Jesus Christ, and the virgin birth. His thought became a fountainhead of Korean conservative theology. In 1953, taking up the presidency of the Presbyterian Theology Seminary, he addressed the inaugural ceremony in the following terms:

The formulation of the theology of the Korean church does not mean creating a particular theological structure but keeping and maintaining the theology based on the correct belief of the traditional Disciples. In other words, this is the theology which we received seventy years ago when the first Korean church was established, and this theology should be followed forever in the name of the Korean church.⁶⁰

This conservative theology, fundamentalism, became deeply rooted in the life of the Korean church through revival meetings and services.

Liberal theology by contrast was concerned to articulate a contextual method for the interpretation of the Bible in relation to the experience of Koreans, as distinct from that of the missionaries and Western Christianity.⁶¹ Representing this theological approach, Kim Chaejun (1901-1990) argued that the Korean church needed to escape the confines of missionary theology and establish the Korean church in its own identity, rather than perpetuate its historical origins as a spiritual colony of United States missionary history.⁶² He founded the Chosŏn Theological Seminary in 1940 as a centre for more liberal theological enterprise. As an Old Testament scholar, he

⁶⁰ Kim Yangsŏn, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Haebang 10 nyŏnsa* (한국기독교 해방 10년사, History of Korean Christianity: 1945-1955) (Seoul: Taehan Yesugyo Changnohoi, 1956), 293.

⁶¹ Ryu Tongsik, "Kidoggyo sasangsa (기독교사상사, History of Christian thought)", 248.

⁶² Ibid., 248.

introduced Higher Criticism, and his prophetic participation in Korean religious society had great impact in determining the denominative characteristics of the present day P.C.R.K.⁶³ He clearly showed a liberal perspective in accepting the theological ideas of Karl Barth. He emphasised that the Korean church could advance as an independent church and communicate with the other churches of the world on an equal footing only if it freed itself from the conservatism of Western missionaries. In addition, Kim Chaejun claimed that it is indispensable to have prophetic courage for this.⁶⁴

The polarity between conservative and liberal theologies produced an ideological confrontation within the Korean church that caused a serious degree of internal fragmentation. This intensified from 1947, after the Second World War, when the Western missionaries returned to Korea and Park Hyŏngryong seized the initiative in Korean Presbyterian circles. Kim Chaejun's Chosŏn Theological Seminary was expelled from the church and was closed down by the conservative theologians.⁶⁵ In 1953, the Presbyterian Committee for Christianity in Korea was organised, and this was the beginning of denominational fragmentation.⁶⁶

The divide between conservative and liberal theologies has continued ever since, with the result that the present-day Korean church is caught right between these opposing forces. Arguably this internal polarity within Protestant Christianity is more severe than that which divides Christianity from other religions. Indeed, the latter

⁶³ Kim Kwangsik, *T'ochaghwa wa Haesŏkhak* (토착화와 해석학, Inculturation and Hermeneutics) (Seoul: Taehan Kidoggyo Press, 1993), 76.

⁶⁴ Kim Chaejun, "Taehan Kidoggyo changrohoe ŭi yŏgsajok ŭiui (대한 기독교장로회의 역사적 의의, Significance of the denomination of Kidoggyo changrohoe)", *Sibjagun*, No. 25, 1956.

⁶⁵ Kim Chaejun introduced the Neo-orthodox theology of Karl Barth which was regarded as too radical, and caused the denomination of Presbyterianism to be divided. Pyon Sŏnhwan, *Hanguk chŏk Sinhak ŭi Mosaek* (한국적 신학의 모색, Search for Korean Indigenous Theology) (Ch'ŏnan: Hanguk Sinhak Yŏnguso, 1997), 76.

⁶⁶ Representatively, Presbyterians can be an example of denominational fragmentation. The fragmentation occurred in 1948 over the issue of shrine worship by the Japanese colonised government. The second one occurred in 1954 over the issue of liberal theologies. The third fragmentation took place in 1959, when the PCOK supported the WCC, which accepts the Russian Orthodox Church as a member, while the PCK against the WCC. In 1979, the PCK was torn apart bit by bit due to issues concerning ecclesiastic authority and regional conflicts.

issue is one of the factors that fuels the theological antagonism between conservative and liberal churches. As conservative Protestantism has espoused the medieval Catholic principle that “there is no salvation outside the church” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), it has added that “there is no salvation in liberal theology” either.⁶⁷ If this is a disincentive for conservative churches to dialogue with liberal churches, divisions among the liberal churches have obstructed any dialogue initiative from the liberal faction as well. As a result it has been difficult to establish any neutral zone between conservative and liberal churches on which a substantive theological dialogue could take place, and each of them hopes to absorb the other through material development.

2. The Polarity in Liberal Theology: Theology of Religion and *minjung* Theology

Liberal theology, like its conservative opponent, owes much to the influence of Western theology. After the Korean War (1950-1953) and in the vortex of political, social and economic difficulties due to the war, a host of theologians studied in Western countries, particularly in the United States, and returned to Korea with their preferred brand of Western theology, either conservative or liberal. Liberal theology was as much an import from the West as was conservative theology. However, by the later 1950s liberal theology was able to challenge the monolith of conservative theology that Park Hyōngryong had constructed. Under the influence of liberal theology,⁶⁸ new theological movements appeared: one sought to advance the theology of religion grounded on principles of ‘indigenisation’ that were developed in the 1960s; and the other was the so-called *minjung* theology of the 1970s. These theological groups tried to break free from the influence of Western theology and attempted to provide local solutions to the substantial problems which occurred in the Korean situation.

⁶⁷ For instance, the conservative Korean church adhered to the theology of missionaries, confirming that ‘there is no salvation in liberal theology’, and even regarding it as a heresy. Min Kyōngbae, “Hanguk ch’odae kyohoe wa sōguhwa munje (한국초대교회와 서구화의 문제, Problem of Westernization and Early Korean Church)”, *Kidoggyo Sasang*, no. 12 (1971), 50

⁶⁸ Ryu Tongsik, “Kidoggyo sasangsa (기독교사상사, History of Christian thought)”, 271.

The theology of religion through indigenisation was primarily concerned with issues of gospel and culture. Associated with the work of Yun Söngböm and Ryu Tongsik, it was set in the midst of the revolutionary currents in Asia, the advent of nationalism and the revival of traditional religions in the post-colonial era.⁶⁹ Yun Söngböm and Ryu Tongsik likened the relation between the gospel and culture as that of seed and soil. In particular, Yun Söngböm, who studied under Karl Barth, considered that exclusive and hostile attitudes towards other religions only stirred up trouble for Christianity in the non-Christian world.⁷⁰ His concern was to explore an integration and harmony between the Christian gospel and the religious traditions of Korea.⁷¹ His theology took a decisive step in applying the *Tangun* Myth⁷², the founding story of Kojosön,⁷³ which is a legacy of Korean religion, to theological themes. For example, he compares the *Tangun* Myth with the Trinity of Christianity, and makes

⁶⁹ Pyöñ Sönhwan, *Hanguk Chökh Sinhak üi Mosaek* (한국적 신학의 모색, Search for Korean Indigenous Theology), 82-83.

⁷⁰ Yun Söngböm, *Hanguk chökh Sinhak* (한국적 신학, Korean Indigenous Theology) (Seoul: Sönmuyöng munhwasa, 1972), 33-34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁷² The *Tangun* Myth was written down in the twelfth century. It was presumably written by Iryön (1206-1289) in order to establish a spiritual foundation for overcoming national crises, for instance invasions by the Mongols and Chinese, by enhancing national identity. This myth is the oldest existing written material which shows the beliefs and worldview of the ancient Koreans.

⁷³ The original text of the *Tangun* Myth is as follows:

The *Wei shu* tells us that two thousand years ago, at the time of Emperor Yao, Tangun Wanggöm chose Asadal as his capital and founded the state of Chosön. The *Old Record* notes that in olden times Hwanin's son, Hwanung, wished to descend from heaven and live in the world of human beings. Knowing his son's desire, Hwanin surveyed the three highest mountains and found Mount T'aebaek the most suitable place for his son to settle and help human beings. Therefore he gave Hwanung three heavenly seals and dispatched him to rule over the people. Hwanung descended with three thousand followers to a spot under a tree by the Holy Altar atop Mount T'aebaek, and he called this place the City of God. He was the Heavenly King Hwanung. Leading the Earl of Wind, the Master of Rain, and the Master of Clouds, he took charge of some three hundred and sixty areas of responsibility, including agriculture, allotted lifespans, illness, punishment, and good and evil, and brought culture to his people.

At the time a bear and a tiger living in the same cave prayed to Holy Hwanung to transform them into human beings. The king gave them a bundle of sacred mugworts and twenty cloves of garlic and said, "If you eat these and shun the sunlight for one hundred days, you will assume human form." Both animals ate the spices and avoided the sun. After twenty-one days the bear became a woman, but the tiger, unable to observe the taboo, remained a tiger. Unable to find a husband, the bear-woman prayed under the altar tree for a child. Hwanung metamorphosed himself, lay with her, and begot a son called Tangun Wanggöm.

In the fiftieth year of the reign of Emperor Yao, Tangun made the walled city of P'yöngyang the capital and called his country Chosön. He then moved his capital to Asadal on Mount Paegak, also named Mount Kunghol, in the year *kimyo* [1122 B.C.], King Wu of Chou enfeoffed Chi Tzu (Kija) to Chosön, Tangun moved to Changdanggyöng, but later he returned and hid in Asadal as a mountain god at the age of one thousand nine hundred and eight. Peter H. Lee, *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization I*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp 6-7. See Iryön, Trans by Lee Chae-ho, *Samguk yusa* (삼국유사) (Seoul: Sol, 1997), 64-70.

an effort to sublate the polarisation between divine and human, Jesus and Christ, and the gospel and laws by employing the Confucian concept of *Söng* (성, 誠, sincerity).⁷⁴

On the other hand, Ryu Tongsik sought to illuminate Korean traditional religions in the light of the gospel, as in his book entitled *Korean Religions and Christianity* (1965). Here he argued that:

Before the transmission of Christianity into Korea, Christ was already working for salvation based on the restoration of humanization through Korean religions and culture.⁷⁵

In Ryu Tongsik's perception, the gospel provides a lens through which it is possible to discern how Christ has been present in Korean history from its beginning. He offers a Christ-centred universalism that is a feature of Western theologies of religious pluralism that developed in the 1960s. Ryu referred to this as '*P'ungryu* (풍류, 風流, tasteful or refined) theology', and he defined as follows: "There is a profound way (spirit), called *P'ungryu*, which includes the concepts of three religions (*Mu*, Buddhism, and Confucianism)."⁷⁶ On this basis, he offered the beginning of a Korean theological fusion between God's activity in the indigenous religions of Korea and in the Christian gospel that he sought to relate to Korean religious pluralism through the refinement of Korean spirituality.

The work of these two Korean theologians is significant because they are concerned with Christianity as one part of the spirituality and religious nature of Korean thought, their aim being to discard the exclusivism of Western Christianity, particularly in the form that the Western missionaries had imported into Korea. In other words, their theologies provide a possibility of doing Korean theology by focusing on the

⁷⁴ Pyöŋ Sönhwan, *Hanguk Chöŋk Sinhak ŭi Mosaek* (한국적 신학의 모색, Search for Korean Indigenous Theology), 85.

⁷⁵ Ryu Tongsik, *Hanguk Chonggyo wa Kidoggyo* (한국 종교와 기독교, Korean Religions and Christianity) (Seoul: Taehan Kidoggyosöhoe, 1965), 114.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

spirituality and religious nature of Asian religions.⁷⁷

A second stream of liberal theology developed in the 1970s in association with popular movements against the dictatorship in Korea, under the influence of the liberation theology of the Third World. *Minjung* theology centres on people who are oppressed politically, exploited economically, isolated socially, and marginalised culturally. From this point of view, any theology that does not address the liberation of oppressed people is an ideology of the 'status quo'. A full-scale advance of *minjung* theology has been produced by a number of theologians who reclaim the Korean people as the subject of Korean history. The primary concern of *minjung* theology is to re-read and reinterpret the history of the Korean peoples on the foundation both of *minjung* and biblical theological views.⁷⁸ In this respect, *minjung* theology is able to maintain its existence as a living theology in the actual field of liberation.

Although these two schools of liberal theology – the theology of religion and *minjung* theology – have made significant advances over conservative Korean theology, neither has succeeded in solving the substantial problems of the Korean church. In the case of the theology of religion, its concern with indigenisation has been primarily cultural and religious, in comparison to which it has tended to neglect the political responsibility of theology. In other words, it has been restricted to internal religious issues, has a tendency to be backward-looking, and thus fails to reinterpret political reality with an eye to the future. Pyŏn Sŏnhwan argues that the theology of Yun Sŏngbŏm is simply fascinated with the god of the Trinity and

⁷⁷ Ryu Tongsik, *Hanguk Chonggyo wa Kidoggyo* (한국 종교와 기독교, Korean Religions and Christianity), 111.

⁷⁸ *Minjung's* view of Korean history is developed by Sŏ Namdong and Kim Yongbok. Sŏ interprets the *minjung's* revolutionary history of Korea as a struggle for justice, to dispel the resentment of Koreans. On the other hand, Kim understands Tonghak Farmers' movement and the 1st March Movement as messianic movements for the renovation of Korean history. The biblical theological view is advanced, centering on An Pyŏngmu, Mun Huisŏk, Kim Ch'anrak, Sŏ Insŏk, and Min Yŏngjin. According to their opinion, *minjung* as 'the suffering servant' is *oklos* with whom Jesus identifies and cultivates unconditional relations. They give an opportunity to understand the reality of Korean *minjung* biblically. See Kim Yongbok, *Hanguk Kidoggyo Sasangsa ūi Chongae* (한국기독교사상사의 전개, Development of Christian Thought in Korea), 183.

repeats 'the soliloquy in the heaven', and that *P'ungryu* theology is concerned only with non-historical myth, and thus fails to understand the condition of the *minjung* in this world in social and political injustice.⁷⁹ This neglect gives the theology of religion a somewhat theoretical character that has failed to translate itself into effective social action in terms of contemporary Korean realities.

Minjung theology, on the other hand, has tended to ignore religious aspects. *Minjung* theologians consider the traditional religions of Korea as sources of the oppression of the people and see them therefore as the objects rather than potential subjects of *minjung*'s liberation theology. Consequently, they emphasise theology as a catalyst of socio-political change and do not understand the religious aspect of theology positively.⁸⁰ *Minjung* theology emphasises the social and political realities of the *minjung* at the expense of their religious aspect and ultimately condones an exclusivist 'theology of missionary Christ'.⁸¹

The practical evidence supporting this analysis is that these two groups within liberal theology have also existed in polarity to each other. This has diminished their ability to influence the development of Korean theology as a whole, or to contextualise it more effectively in the lives of the people. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that these two forms of theology are inherently opposed to each other. To take the African example, theologies of indigenisation in East, Central and West Africa developed in response to the colonial tendency to denigrate African culture, and under these conditions they developed separately from the liberation theology of South Africa which was struggling to free people from the dehumanising conditions of Apartheid. Yet it is increasingly evident that African theologies of indigenisation are also concerned with political liberation, as Black theology in South Africa is also

⁷⁹ Pyŏn Sŏnhwan, *Hanguk chŏk Sinhak ŭi Mosaek* (한국적 신학의 모색, Search for Korean Indigenous Theology), 95.

⁸⁰ Sŏ Kwangsŏn, "Hanguk ŭi musok kwa kidoggyo (한국의 무속과 기독교, Shamanism and Christianity in Korea)", *Kyohoe wa Segye* (교회와 세계), vol 27 (1984, 1), 16-19.

⁸¹ Pyŏn Sŏnhwan, "T'achonggyo wa sinhak (타종교와 신학, Other Religion and Theology)", ed. by Kim Sŭngch'ŏl, *Religious Pluralism and Christianity II* (Seoul: Nadan Press, 1993), 209.

concerned with cultural indigenisation. Indigenisation and liberation are necessarily inter-related, two sides of a single coin, and this is being recognised more fully by the present generation of African theologians.⁸² On similar grounds, it can be argued that the distinction between the Korean theology of religion and *minjung* theology is superficial, and that at a deeper level they are complementary. Accordingly, they can build Korean theology distinctively through mutual integration and creative re-interpretation.

E. Conclusion

The historical overview of the transmission of Christianity into Korea that has been presented in this chapter has concentrated on the degree to which Christianity has been able to insert itself into the religiously plural context of Korean culture. In conclusion this can be said to have been a history of promising beginnings and frustrating setbacks. In this respect the histories of Catholicism and Protestantism represent mirror images of one another. Catholicism's history began with the creation of a Confucian-Christian community that in important respects modelled a way in which Christianity is able to re-interpret itself constructively in relation to religious pluralism. Unfortunately this nascent growth was extinguished by a combination of exclusivisms: the theological exclusivism of Roman Catholicism, which forbade Christians to practice Confucian rites; and the political exclusivism of the Chosŏn state, which privileged Confucianism as the state religion. With Korean Protestantism we see the inversion of this process: a missionary Christianity which planted a strongly exclusivist understanding of the gospel in the mind of early Korean converts, but is increasingly challenged today by the growth of liberal Korean Protestantism which emphasises the need to indigenise the gospel in a culture of religious pluralism and the need to liberate all Koreans from the oppressive socio-economic conditions that arise from Western capitalism. Common to the histories of

⁸² See Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1993).

both Catholicism and Protestantism in Korea is the fact that where they are promoted by indigenous as distinct from expatriate interests, they more readily engage with religious pluralism and adopt it as the living context of their own indigenisation. In the case of both Catholic and Protestant histories, it is Western missionaries who have sought to obstruct this process. It must be recognised that they have done so with some success, as evidenced particularly in the conservative stream of Korean Protestantism, which continues the American missionaries' characterisation of non-Christian religions and culture as heathen.

But the rise of an indigenous Korean theology of religion since the 1960s is evidence that exclusivist Christian theology does not pass unchallenged. Indeed, it provides empirical evidence that the concerns of this thesis for local Christian theology that engages constructively with Korea's religious pluralism are well founded. On these grounds, the external rapid growth of the Korean church should be re-defined in terms of Korean religious history and of Korean thought, and more stress should be placed on establishing an appropriate theology which is able to address the challenges of religious pluralism, whether in Korean or in global terms. This was the challenge to which Ryu Yöngmo devoted his life, and to which we can now turn, having established the background of Korean religious pluralism and the promise and failure of Korean Christianity to insert itself into this pluralist situation.

Chapter Three. The Life of Ryu Yŏngmo (1890-1981)

A. Introduction

It has been argued so far that every Korean existentially relates to three religious traditions – *Mu*, Buddhism, and Confucianism – which comprise the religious pluralism that is one of the defining features of Korean culture. The evidence for this was presented in Chapter 1 in historical terms that reviewed the way in which these three religious traditions evolved and interacted over centuries of Korean history. The chapter also examined contemporary evidence from the demographic and sociological analysis of religious allegiance in Korea. It was noted in conclusion, however, that it is in terms of personal experience that Koreans engage with religious pluralism as an inalienable part of everyday life. It is with this dimension that the present chapter is concerned. It seeks to illustrate in the life of Ryu Yŏngmo, the principal subject of this thesis, what existential engagement in religious pluralism entails.

In reviewing the life of Ryu Yŏngmo, three elements will be emphasised in terms of primary interests of this thesis. Firstly, religious experience had priority over theological conceptualisation in Ryu Yŏngmo's thought. He was guided by experience, and left very little by way of systematic theological writing. Indeed, his most important theological writings are found in his personal diaries, characteristically in the form of brief reflections and poetic utterances. This presents the reader with immense difficulties of interpretation and the danger of distorting Ryu's ideas by trying to re-express them systematically.

Secondly, Ryu's intellectual and spiritual life were centred on his experience of *Kkaedalŭm*, the Korean term for 'awakening' or 'self-awakening'. In the absence of any stable definition of *Kkaedalŭm* in his diaries, it is essential to examine his life for evidence of what *Kkaedalŭm* meant for him experientially. The chapter will seek to

demonstrate that it was his method of understanding his religious background, and therefore of the religious pluralism that defines Korean culture.

Thirdly, Ryu's life provides the framework of his local theology. Ryu never tired of insisting on a direct relationship between faith and practice. *Kkaedalŭm* demanded the practical re-orientation of his life, not simply a transformation in the way he thought. Although he first experienced *Kkaedalŭm* as a Christian, it led him into an active engagement with religious pluralism, and this in turn radically re-shaped the way in which he understood his Christian faith. This dimension of Ryu's theological experience is central to his construction of a local theology, and this chapter therefore provides the framework for the examination of Ryu's theology in Part Two of the thesis.

B. Early Life in Confucian Society (1890-1904)

Ryu Yŏngmo was born on March 13, 1890 in Hanyang (한양, 漢陽, now Seoul), the capital of Chosŏn Korea. He was the eldest of ten children born to Ryu Myŏnggŭn and his wife, Kim Wanchŏn. Within the strict social differentiation of Chosŏn Korea, Ryu Myŏnggŭn, a leather worker, belonged to the *chungin* class. His was a poor family, which lived in conditions of relative poverty. Only two of the ten children – Ryu and his younger brother, Yŏngch'ŏl – survived due to the poor conditions of public health and medical service at the time.¹ In later life Ryu Myŏnggŭn achieved some economic success in developing a small tanning business that enabled him to provide education for his sons.

It has already been noted in previous chapters that the Chosŏn dynasty was in serious decline in the late nineteenth century. The traditional value system of Confucianism on which Chosŏn was grounded was incapable of responding to internal and external pressures on the state. Internal political life was thrown into disorder by the storm of

¹ Park Yŏngho, *Ssia* (씨알) (Seoul: Hongikchae, 1994), 16.

external affairs that drew Chosŏn into its vortex. Chosŏn's traditional trading links with China were challenged by military interventions by France (1866) and the United States (1871), which in turn encouraged Japan to divert Korean trade to itself by forcing Chosŏn to accept a diplomatic treaty in 1876. Japan's struggle to control Chosŏn provoked the Sino-Japanese war of the mid 1890s (1894-1895). Japan's victory over China in turn provoked the Russo-Japanese war in the early years of the twentieth century (1904-1905). Victorious in both these two confrontations, Japan gained a firm footing in Manchuria and established itself as the leading military power in East Asia. Immediately following its defeat of Russia, Japan imposed a treaty of protection on Chosŏn, though by this time the state had already been forced to change its name to *Taehan Cheguk* (대한제국, 大韓帝國), (October 1897). Japanese 'protection' amounted to control of Korea's external affairs and increasing involvement in internal political and economic administration. Korean society proved unable to resist Japanese intervention. This was due in part to the fact that late Chosŏn society was itself split into two groups: one adhered to the traditional structure of society and the Confucian value system, and the other wanted to adopt Western culture and systems as a reform. Thus, the Korean people were in ceaseless confusion and too weak to defend their country by themselves. Strongly opposed as they were to Japanese invasion of their sovereignty, they had finally to submit to full Japanese occupation in August 1910.²

In terms of religion, Confucianism, the dominant authority and the foundation of politics, society, culture, and religion throughout the five hundred years of Chosŏn, was losing its power. In addition, the class structure, which supported the Confucian order of society and politics, was collapsing.³

These, then, were the turbulent conditions in which Ryu Yŏngmo was brought up. They explain the keen social and political interest that he demonstrated in his youth

² Yŏksahak Yŏnguso, *Kwangjwa Hanguk Kŭnhyŏndaesa* (강좌 한국 근현대사, Lectures on Modern Korean History), 79.

³ For details of the class structure of Chosŏn Dynasty, see Chapter 2.

and early adulthood. In one respect, however, the decline of the traditional order of Chosŏn Korea gave Ryu Yŏngmo a chance which would not have been available in the earlier Chosŏn. Born into a low social rank, Confucian tradition would have excluded him from being educated. With the modernising changes that were being brought about through foreign interventions in Chosŏn, reform of traditional patterns of education was introduced, one of the effects of which was to make education more accessible to people regardless of their social class. The ten years between 1895 and 1905 saw the rapid growth of primary and secondary education in Seoul. According to the statistics for 1895, five primary schools and thirty-seven secondary schools were in existence. These included Western schools founded by American missionaries: the Wŏnsan Haksa (원산학사, 元山學士), established in 1883 and Paejae Haktang (배재학당, 培材學堂), established in 1886, both of which owed their origins to the American Methodist missionary H. G. Appenzeller (1858-1902). From here on, modern schools started to be built,⁴ and this gave a chance for young Koreans to encounter a new concept of education. Experimentation with the Western system of education also resulted in further decline of the traditional Confucian educational system.⁵

In this new culture that encouraged education for all, Ryu Yŏngmo's learning began at the age of five when his father introduced him to the the Confucian classics through simplified summaries of the texts: the *Ch'ŏnjamun* (천자문, 千字文), the Thousand-Chinese Character Text, and *Tonmong sŏnsŭp* (동몽선습, 童蒙先習) a basic instructional text for children. At the age of six, he joined the regular school system of Chosŏn society, the so-called *Sŏdang* (서당, 書堂), a sort of private primary school.⁶

⁴ The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol.1, 197.

⁵ Kyodong Kukminhakkyo, *Kyodong Kusipnyŏnsa* (교동 90년사, Ninety years history of Kyodong elementary school) (Seoul: Kyodong Kugminhakkyo, 1984), 47-49.

⁶ This institute taught most children regardless of rank. Even though it provided a kind of informal education, it played a great role in terms of universal education. The ages of children ranged from five to six years mostly, but those who were over 20 could also be taught.

Ryu's *Sōdang* education gave him a broad foundation in basic knowledge. It would have included introduction to teachings of Neo-Confucianism on humanity and human propriety. This would have been followed by study of natural surroundings, embracing both the study of nature, i.e., the cosmos and animal life, and morality that was understood to be in harmony with nature, providing a basis for social life. He would also have been introduced to the study of Korean history, the purpose of which was to cultivate a historical sense of independence in the young students.⁷

Ryu Yōngmo's *Sōdang* education was interrupted by illness when, at the age of seven, he was infected by cholera. This forced him to stay at home for the next three to four years, after which he entered the Hasudong (하수동) primary school, where he studied between the ages of ten and twelve. This would have exposed the young Ryu more directly to Japanese influence, since – as has already been explained – Japan was increasingly in control of Korean education among other internal affairs of Chosŏn society. Korean protest against such intervention fuelled the intensity of the nationalist movement, and this, according to Park Yōngho's account of Ryu's life, is the reason why Ryu's father withdrew him from the school, one year before the three-year course would have ended: "I thought I had to do it [i.e., withdraw] at that moment," Park quotes Ryu as saying, and he interpreted Ryu's words as evidence of his anti-Japanese sentiment.⁸ As a result, Ryu returned to study at *Sōdang*, where he was taught by Kim Insu, who instructed him in the thought of Mencius (맹자, 孟子, 372? - 289? B.C.), one of the major contributors to classic Confucianism.⁹

Late Chosŏn was marked by confrontation between traditional Confucian social values and new Western ideas. It was an unequal confrontation: Chosŏn, as we have

⁷ Cho Yōnsuk, "Ch'odŭng kyoyuk (초등교육, Primary education)", Yi Yongdok ed., *Hanguk Kŭnhyondae Kyoyuksa* (한국 근현대 교육사, History of Education in Modern Korea) (Seoul: Hanguk chongsinmunhwa yonguso, 1995), 84. McGinn, N.F. et. al., *Education and Development in Korea* (Massachusetts & London: Council on East Asian Studies Harvard University, 1980). Thomas, R. Murray & Postlethwaite, T. Neville eds., *Schooling in East Asia* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1983).

⁸ Park Yōngho, *Ssial*, 23.

⁹ Park Yōngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yōngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yōngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1 (Seoul: Hongikche, 1996), 42.

seen, was politically weak and subject to increasing Japanese domination; Western ideas, by contrast, were empowered by the growth of Western colonial influence in East Asia. The cultural and ideological turbulence of this confrontation was to be the context of Ryu's intellectual life. His early foundation in traditional Confucian thought and values was to remain with him for the rest of his life. His adherence to Confucian values stimulated his youthful resistance to the Japanese occupation, and as a defining basis of his existence, was the source of his thought, and of his understanding of religious concepts. Moreover, his Confucian thought helped him to understand the ethos of the other Korean religions, and in turn was to be the framework in which he re-interpreted Christianity.

C. The Encounter with the West and Christianity (1905-1911)

Ryu's first encounter with Christianity came about, it appears, as a result of his nationalist opposition to the Japanese. After the imposition of the 1905 Treaty of Protection, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), protected as it was by the power of Western countries, particularly the USA, became a place where Korean patriots could meet in relative safety. Both Ryu and his brother, Yŏngmuk, began attending YMCA meetings where they were soon steeped in nationalist thinking, one of the tenets of which was that the way to regaining national sovereignty lay in education that engaged with the new learning from the West. Accepting this premise, Ryu also began to take an interest in Christianity. Under the guidance of Kim Chŏngsik, the YMCA director at this time, and also a renowned educator, nationalist, and fighter for independence, Ryu began attending a Protestant church. Judging from Ryu's personal reminiscence of this event, it would appear that his introduction to Christianity came about primarily through his admiration of Kim's nationalism.

In the spring when I was 15, I went to Yŏndong Church for the first time with my dead brother, Yŏngmuk, for the pleasure of hearing a teacher, Kim Chŏngsik.¹⁰

¹⁰ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 30.

Although Ryu may not originally have intended to accept Christianity, he began to read the Bible eagerly and to attend Christian worship with some frequency: Yöndong Church (Presbyterian) on Sunday mornings, the Sündong Church (Methodist) on Sunday afternoons, and Saemunan Church (the first organised Presbyterian Church in Korea) on Sunday evenings.¹¹ This practice continued until he left Seoul to become a teacher at Chöngju Osan school in June, 1910.

At the same time Ryu enrolled at the Hansöng Foreign Language School, one of the Western educational institutes in Seoul, where he spent a couple of years learning Japanese. Again his motive was to strengthen the struggle for national sovereignty: as he later wrote in his diary, “In order to take back our nation from Japan, we have to beat Japan. In order to beat Japan, we have to know them first.”¹² Through Japanese he was also able to access a greater amount of Western literature that was being translated in Japan. He was thus able to extend his knowledge of Western culture, thought, and civilisation. This included an interest in Western science. One of his disciples, Ham Sökhön, later recalled “he has a natural talent for science”.¹³ This he was able to develop through his studies from 1907 in Kyöngshin school, where he was top of his class in science, while also proving himself an excellent student in the humanities. But it was science that he was hired to teach at the Osan school (1910), as it was science that he decided to study at a more advanced level when he enrolled in the Tokyo School of Physics in Japan (1912-1913).

It was at the age of 19, in 1909, just one year before he graduated from Kyöngshin school, that Ryu first began teaching. He was invited to give instruction in Yangpyöng school on the new Western learning. Ryu accepted the position, even

¹¹ Park Yönggho, *Ssial*, 32.

¹² Park, Yönggho, *Tasökh Ryu Yöngmo üi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yöngmo's life and thought), Vol. 1, 48. Fundamentally, this statement is based on a Chinese classic, *Sunzu Bingfa* (손자병법, 孫子兵法), which is an account of the oldest military treaties in the world, authored by *Sun Zi* (손무, 孫武, ? - ?) in Ch'un Ch'iu (춘추, 春秋, 722-481 B.C.) period. There is a famous phrase, “If I know the enemy first and know myself, there is no defeat (知彼知己百戰不殆).”

¹³ Park Yönggho, *Tasökh Ryu Yöngmo üi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 42.

before his own graduation, out of the conviction that it was more important to be contributing to a re-strengthening of the nation by teaching young people than to finish his own schooling.¹⁴ However, his employment with the school was terminated after the first six months due to his outspoken opposition to Japanese interference in Korea. Faced by the crisis of 1910, when Japan formally annexed Korea, Ryu turned to the Bible for solace and explanation. According to his disciple, Park Yŏngho, Ryu realised at this moment that the owner of all things in the world is God and that world history is governed by God. He thus discovered his own unconditional belief in God.¹⁵

In the autumn of 1910, Ryu was asked to become a teacher at Osan school by Namgang Yi Sŭnghun (이승훈, 李昇薰, 1864-1930). At Osan school, Ryu became acquainted with many persons who were to become his close friends and later his disciples, e.g., Shin Ch'aeho, Yŏ Chun, Yi Kwangsu. In addition, he read the works of Leo Tolstoi (1828-1910).¹⁶ Ryu taught physics, chemistry, mathematics, and astronomy, and started his classes by praying and reading the Bible. It seems that Ryu tried to sublimate the sadness of national ruin by enthusiasm for education and Christian faith. The founder of Osan school, Yi Sŭnghun, was impressed by Ryu's religious outlook, so much so that he also converted to Christianity at Changdaehyŏn (장대현) Church just three months after Ryu came to the school. Yi Sŭnghun changed the educational principle of school in line with the Christian spirit, and built a church on the school campus. Thus, Osan school became a mission school directly as a result of the influence of Ryu's faith on his teacher colleagues and their students.

¹⁴ Most pioneers were under 20. For instance, when Sŏ Chaep'il (서재필, 徐載弼, 1864-1951) participated in the Kabsin Reforms he was 18 years old, when An Ch'angho (안창호, 安昌浩, 1878-1938) established a national movement organization, Sinminhoe (신민회, 新民會) and Taesŏng school he was 19 years old, and when Ch'oi Namsŏn (최남선, 崔南善, 1890-1957) published a journal 'Sonyŏn (소년, 少年)' he was 19 years old. Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

¹⁶ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 110.

D. Towards the Way of *Kkaedalŭm* (깨달음, Awakening) (1912-1922)

Common throughout East Asian religion and philosophy is the notion of self-awakening. It denotes a fundamental awakening of the self through intuitive realisation of the truth, which is achieved through a disciplined process of cultivation of one's spiritual, intellectual and practical life. To paraphrase the interpretation of Hisamatsu, a representative scholar of the Kyoto School of Japanese Buddhism,¹⁷ self-awakening seeks to overcome the 'absolute uncertainty' that physical death imposes on human life by re-centering life around the 'absolute death' of selfish appetites and 'rebirth' into relationship with the Absolute (絶對無), which entails self-awakening to moral, ethical and intellectual certainty.

In Korean such self-awakening is known as *Kkaedalŭm*. Akin to the Japanese understanding, it seeks to overcome the crisis of 'absolute uncertainty' that confronts each human being as long as death exists as the fatal 'absolute uncertainty' of human life. *Kkaedalŭm* elevates death from a negative value to a positive experience that transforms the very core of human life. This 'higher death' (대사, 大死) can be described as death of 'absolute uncertainty' through a self-awakening that converts the uncertainties of death into the spiritual, ethical and logical cultivation of life. It affirms that truth is apprehended through the cultivation of one's inner transcendence of physical death and the re-orientation of one's life through the cultivation of one's spiritual faculties. This understanding of *Kkaedalŭm* as self-awakening can be likened to a journey by which a person progresses through ever more enlightened perceptions of the truth.

For Ryu the journey toward *Kkaedalŭm* started when he was teaching at Osan school. A critical stage of this journey was his acceptance of Christian faith, and it is clear from his diaries that this was a transforming moment in his life's journey. Unlike many for whom conversion entails a rejection of earlier beliefs, however, Ryu saw

¹⁷ Park Yŏnggho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saengae wa sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's life and thought), Vol. 1, 107.

his conversion as a stage in his journey toward *Kkaedalŭm*, of which Confucianism was also an essential part. He continued to appreciate the rationality of Confucianism as a valuable basis for society and for social organisation. He rejected the religious accretions of popular Confucian practice, but affirmed Confucianism's rational willingness to interact with other religious principles, especially those of Buddhism and Taoism. Likewise, he retained a positive attitude to these other religious traditions, on the principle that Christianity should interact with other religions in ways that affirm what is good in them, at the same time opening itself to be influenced positively by them. His understanding of *Kkaedalŭm* was therefore fundamentally one of religious pluralism, in which the self-cultivation of each religion necessitated its being engaged in a dynamic relationship of mutual learning and mutual transformation. This approach to religious pluralism is a logical extension of Ryu's understanding of *Kkaedalŭm* in terms of personal self-cultivation: as, at a personal level, *Kkaedalŭm* overcomes the fatal uncertainty of death through the enhancement of one's rational, emotional and spiritual faculties, so at the level of religious pluralism, *Kkaedalŭm* is the way of overcoming the death that confronts Christianity where it insists on an exclusive understanding of truth and denies the contribution of other religions to the self-cultivation of human society. *Kkaedalŭm* therefore led Ryu to an authentically Korean approach to different religions that sought to redefine the self-understanding of each in a dynamic process of mutual self-cultivation. *Kkaedalŭm* was the way of his advancing to a higher truth, where each religion enables other religions to flourish, rather than each judging the others narrowly by its own standards. In consequence, his enthusiastic acceptance of Christianity enabled him to pioneer a relationship with the other religions of Korea that offered Christianity a way of integrating itself in the Korean context of religious pluralism. The process of *Kkaedalŭm* provided Ryu with an important basis for dialogue between religions.

While Ryu's understanding of *Kkaedalŭm* in terms of religious pluralism has an authentically Korean character, his intellectual development was influenced in this

direction by his reading of Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoi (1828-1910), whose writings were available throughout Korea in Japanese translation, his complete works having been imported from Japan by Yi Kwangsu.¹⁸ Yi Kwangsu was a friend of Ryu, and introduced him to Tolstoi's ideas, about which he (Yi) wrote an article in the Korean journal *Ch'öngch'un* (청춘). In this article Yi criticised the conservative and exclusive nature of Christianity as interpreted by the Western missionaries, caricaturing their version of Christianity as 'a tyranny of orthodoxy'.¹⁹ Tolstoi presented Ryu with a set of ideas that launched him on his own intellectual critique of the Christianity which he had embraced initially from nationalist fervour more than from careful reasoning. In a revealing comment in his diaries he remarked: "I entered the Christian faith as a fifteen-year-old. I was crying for the cross and my faith was rooted in the cross when I was a twenty-two-year-old. Both Tolstoi and I are unorthodox."²⁰

Scholars take different views of the degree to which Ryu was influenced by Tolstoi. Ch'oi Insik insists, on the one hand, that Ryu learned from Tolstoi that it was possible to affirm the spiritual and ethical value of Jesus, on the basis of his life and teaching as illustrated pre-eminently in the Sermon on the Mount, while rejecting the church's doctrines about Jesus, especially the doctrines of his divinity, of the Trinity, and of salvation in terms of Atonement. On the other hand, Yi Chöngbae argues that it is impossible to trace such specific influence of Tolstoi on Ryu's theology: rather, Tolstoi's influence being general among Korean intellectuals at this time, Ryu would have been aware of his ideas in general more than specific terms. He concludes therefore that Ryu's theological ideas remain essentially his own. The present writer takes a position between these two views. As will be shown in Chapter 5 of this thesis, which deals with Ryu's Christology, Ryu's acceptance of Christianity was fundamentally a decision to follow Jesus as a human being whose self-cultivated

¹⁸ Yi Kwangsu (이광수, 李光洙, 1892-1950) was a poet, novelist, and literature reviewer in Korea. Ryu was acquainted with him from when they were teachers at Osan School.

¹⁹ Yi Kwangsu, "Kūmil Chosŏn Yasogyo ūi kyŏlchŏm (금일 조선교회 약소교의 결점, The weakness of the Chosŏn Church at present)", *Ch'öngch'un*, November 1917.

²⁰ Park, Yöngho, *Ssial*, 58.

humanity gave him a direct and immediate apprehension of the Truth through the process of *Kkaedalŭm*. Ryu's own *Kkaedalŭm* was therefore modelled on that of Jesus, the man, but in interpreting this Ryu dispensed entirely with the doctrines of Christology as taught by Western Christianity. Like Tolstoi, Ryu was drawn to the ethical teaching of Jesus and to the way in which he showed how this can be translated into a living practice of unreserved love.²¹ Like Tolstoi, Ryu found this in the Sermon on the Mount.²² Tolstoi resolved the teaching of the Sermon into five spiritual-ethical principles: to live at peace with all human beings; to transcend sexuality; to speak calmly; to resist evil non-violently; and to love one's enemies.²³ These correspond to the ethical principles of Ryu's own life and to his concept of self-cultivation by 'returning to One' (귀일, *kwi-il*), which will be examined in Chapter 6. The similarities between Ryu and Tolstoi on these central points of their respective thinking are hard to deny, and suggest that Ryu absorbed Tolstoi's thought in the process of articulating similar ideas in an authentically Korean idiom.

In terms of Ryu's personal history, however, it is another aspect of Tolstoi's life that seems to have aided his own sense of direction. Tolstoi's independent thinking, and his criticism of the orthodox theology of the Russian Orthodox Church, led to his excommunication in 1901.²⁴ This is paralleled by Ryu's own relationship with the Protestant Church in Korea. Having been a regular attender of Protestant worship in the early phase of his conversion, after studying Tolstoi's work, he quit attending church, singing hymns and praying in public. The reasons for Ryu's alienation from the church are several: he suffered a personal crisis of faith on the death of his brother, Yŏngmuk; he felt the bitterness of nationalist criticism of the Western and colonial character of mission-founded churches. It would therefore be incorrect to suppose that Ryu's distancing himself from orthodox Christianity was the result of direct influence of Tolstoi's example upon him. But he seems to have taken comfort

²¹ Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1986), 176-192.

²² Henry Gifford, *Tolstoy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46.

²³ Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy: An Approach* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1944), 96.

²⁴ Henry Gifford, *Tolstoy*, 46-48.

from the fact that Tolstoi also was forced to abandon a church-affiliated Christianity.²⁵ It was during his two years at Osan school that Ryu absorbed Tolstoi's analytic and critical thinking on theology. When the death of Tolstoi (1910. 11.7) was reported in a newspaper, all the students and teachers of Osan school gathered and a memorial service was held, which Ryu attended.²⁶

Ryu's growing scepticism regarding orthodox Christian faith increased with the death of his younger brother, Yŏngmuk, in 1911, the year following Tolstoi's passing. Ryu referred to this event in his diaries as follows:

When I was twenty-one, my nineteen-year-old brother died. When he died, I lost my heart. After that accident, I thought that there is nothing complete in this world. This world is a relative one, so anything can happen. It is worthless to expect anything when this kind of thing occurs.²⁷

His brother's death caused him deep personal grief and a spiritual crisis that led him to question the capacity of any religion to offer the assurance of absolute truth. The world, and religions as part of it, are relative, and at best they offer relative ways of dealing with the 'fatal uncertainty' of death. "The core of religion is death," he wrote: "The practice of dying is philosophy, and overcoming death is religion."²⁸ The death of his brother led him to deny that the revelation of God ended with Jesus and that the Bible is the only truth. From this moment, he started to scrutinise Buddhist scriptures and the works of Lao-tzu (노자, 老子, 604- 531 B.C.)²⁹ to discover what truth they contained.³⁰ From this time onwards, according to Yu

²⁵ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saenggak kwa Midŭm* (다석 유영모의 생각과 믿음, Ryu Yŏngmo's Thought and Belief) (Seoul: Hyŏndae Munhwa Sinmun, 1995), 97-99.

²⁶ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 110.

²⁷ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 62.

²⁸ Park Yŏngho ed., *Tongbangŭi Sŏngin: Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo* (동방의 성인: 다석 유영모, Eastern Saint: Ryu Yŏngmo) (Seoul: Muae, 1993), 227.

²⁹ Park Yŏngho compares Ryu's attention to other religious scriptures with Yulgok Yi I's experience which was mentioned earlier in Chapter 1. Yi I was a member of the elite in a Confucian society who passed a national examination for officials (진사, 進士) at 13 years old, and he turned to the study of Buddhist and Taoist scriptures after his mother passed away suddenly when he was 19 years old. Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 62.

³⁰ Park Yŏngho ed., *Tongbangŭi Sŏngin: Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo*, 129.

Yŏngchong, Ryu became fascinated with Buddhist and Taoist concepts,³¹ such as *kong* (공, 空, Emptiness) and *mu* (무, 無, Nothingness), and – like Tolstoi – widened his theological horizons beyond the traditional Christian orthodoxy that the church represented.³²

Challenged thus by Tolstoi at an intellectual level, and by his brother's death at a spiritual level, Ryu decided to leave Osan school and traditional Christianity. As if to symbolise this break, he decided to leave Korea and to go to Japan to study science. In September 1912 he enrolled in the Tokyo School of Physics in order to prepare himself for university entrance. By June the following year he was ready to move to the university, but suddenly reversed his decision, abandoned his plans for university education, and returned to Korea. There were no external reasons to explain this sudden change: he had academic ability, good health, and money enough to pay his way. Therefore one should not doubt the explanation that he later gave for this decision in his diaries:

Putting away worldly advancement and fame, or success in life, committing oneself to the truth is the real meaning of life. Unless you return to God Father, there is no life. To abandon the flesh and this world is to start to believe in the right way. Those who love this world do not know God. God is walking toward those who hate the world. Some think that most problems can be solved by entering a university, but it is a fantasy that to enter and graduate from a university enables you to solve social problems. Rather, social evils occur due to universities. Those who have higher education commit more severe crimes and more serious social abuses.... I am against universities.³³

He seems to have reached a point of religious certainty as a result of struggling with the question of entering a university. When in later life he was asked by disciples which was the most anguished moment of his life, he replied that was when he

³¹ See Richard F. Gustafson, *Leo Tolstoy: Resident and Stranger*, 88-109.

³² Yu Yŏngchong, "Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Chonggyo Sasang Yŏngu (다석 류영모의 생애와 종교사상 연구, Study of Ryu Yongmo's Life and Religious Thought)", Th. M Dissertation (Seoul: Kamshindae, 1996), 33.

³³ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 123.

decided against entering the university: but it was the moment of his *Kkaedalŭm* when he realised that he had learned to transcend the uncertainties of death by inner transformation of his own life by committing himself to self-cultivation.³⁴ In this respect he can be compared with a Buddhist monk of Silla, Wŏnhyo,³⁵ who attained *Kkaedalŭm* while he was on his way to study abroad, and returned. Back in Korea, Ryu threw himself into the study of the eighty volumes of the *Avatamsaka-sutra* (화엄경, 華嚴經, Voluminous Mahayana Buddhist text), a Buddhist scripture written by a monk in Tang China.³⁶ The purpose of this study was to seek to arrive at an understanding of the comparative values of Christian and Buddhist thought on the basis of Confucian knowledge. But the character of his study life was very different from what he would have anticipated in the university. From the outset he combined intellectual study with spiritual formation. Thus, in 1918, in the twenty-eighth year of his mortal life, he transcended his mortality by a fundamental expression of *Kkaedalŭm*, namely the ‘counting of the days of one’s life’ (산날 셈하기). He wrote of this in an article in the *Ch’ŏngch’un* journal as follows:

What is the ultimate meaning of my life? The I who exists here and today can be called *tongch’uliimyŏng* (동출이이명, 同出而異名),³⁷ which means ‘the one with three different names’ – myself, today, and here. ‘Today’ means that I am here; ‘here’ indicates that I am living today; and ‘I’ means the person who lives here and today. Even though people live in different places and times, the true picture of life is to be found in terms of today, here, and I. Although we can say yesterday or tomorrow, yesterday is merely the posthumous title of today and tomorrow is only the assumed name of today.³⁸

To count the days of one’s life means to live ‘a today life’, life being a continuous today. It means to stop thinking in terms of yesterday or tomorrow; only today exists. In other words, counting the days of one’s life means to be awake to the eternal

³⁴ Ryu did not send his children (three sons and one daughter) to universities. However, the revolution of 4.19 (19th April), which arose among university students, made him change his mind. Park Yŏnggho, *Ssial*, 68-69.

³⁵ This was discussed in Chapter 1.

³⁶ Park Yŏnggho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo’s life and thought), Vol. 1, 169.

³⁷ Literally this means that different names came from the same source.

³⁸ Ryu Yŏnggho, “Onŭl (오늘, Today)”, *Ch’ŏngch’un*, No. 14, June 1918.

importance of today. It is to escape the 'fatal uncertainty' of mortal time that is defined by death, and to live each and every 'today' for God. *Kkaedalŭm* thus entails more than re-orientating one's life in ethical and spiritual terms. It means reconstructing life itself, to see it no longer as a horizontal journey through time, from birth to death, but as a vertical journey from transcendence into the Absolute.³⁹

Ryu's *Kkaedalŭm* is based on the notions of 'here' and 'today-now' between the eternal past and future.⁴⁰ This commitment to the counting of his days marked his emergence from the crises and searching of his recent years, and his entry into a new stage of his religious thought that was founded in *Kkaedalŭm*. From this time onwards, his devotion to this new life of self-cultivation never abated.

This was evidenced by his non-involvement in the 1st March Independence Movement of 1919, the climax of Korean nationalist resistance to Japanese occupation. In view of Ryu's early attachment to nationalism, his participation in this movement would have been expected. The main leader of this movement was Yi Sŭnghun, a founder of Osan school, and Ryu's father, Ryu Myŏnggŭn, was one of the forty-eight national representatives. The declaration of the movement was drawn up by Ryu's friend, Ch'oi Namsŏn. In this respect, it would have been natural for him to take a great part in the movement. It was also a non-violent movement which drew support from the leaders of Christianity, Buddhism, and Ch'ŏndogyo (천도교). Over 2 million people took part, of whom 7,500 were killed by the Japanese police, 16,000 injured, and 46,000 arrested.⁴¹ But Ryu did not participate, and his non-participation can be explained only in terms of his *Kkaedalŭm* that entailed a detachment from the affairs of this world in order to devote himself entirely to the

³⁹ The journal *Ch'ŏngch'un* was launched by Yuktang Ch'oi Namsŏn in 1914, and was the first monthly magazine in Korea. With 300 pages in Korean, it aimed at enlightenment and education of the people. It ceased publication under Japanese pressure in September 1918. The first meeting between Ryu and Ch'oe Namsŏn was arranged by Yi Kwangsu, and Ryu published his article 'My 123', in no. 2 of *Ch'ŏngch'un*.

⁴⁰ Park Yŏnggho, *Ssial*, 114.

⁴¹ For details, see The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, *A History of Korean Church*, Vol. 2, 24-41.

cultivation of his inner life.

His disciple, Ham Sökhön (1901-1989), describes Ryu's state of *Kkaedalŭm* in 1921 in his essay, *Insanggi* (인상기), as follows:

At that time he was thirty-two years old. At first glance, I could feel that he was a person who can make people be calm. This always appeared in every motion, talking, and looking. He was an alert person. He never lost his concentration for a moment. When he sat, he always rested on his knees, he never stretched out his legs even once.⁴²

E. Consolidation of Ryu's Views on Religion (1923-1940)

In 1928 Ryu was invited by the YMCA director, Kim Chöngsik, to take over the leadership of a Bible study group that was meeting at the YMCA, called the *yöngyöng* group (연경반).⁴³ The group was originally convened by Hyön Dongwan, and was to continue until Hyön Dongwan's death thirty-five years later in 1963. The regular members of the group were quite small in number, about twenty, but over the years more than seven hundred people participated in its meetings. The YMCA, as has already been noted, was the only place where people could gather and discuss issues of religion and nationalism during the period of Japanese occupation, since it enjoyed *de facto* US military protection. Leadership of this group provided Ryu with an important public platform where he gave regular lectures that established his reputation as one of the three leading thinkers in Seoul, the population of which had by this time grown to about twenty thousand.⁴⁴

It was with this group that Ryu was able to work out his religious ideas following his

⁴² In the context of Korean Confucian customs, usually the younger should kneel to show respect in front of the elder. In this light, whenever Ryu knelt, it meant that he showed respect for everyone, regardless of age or class. Moreover, the fact he never stretched out his legs meant that he had a modest attitude towards everyone. Kim Hüngho, *Chesori*, 11.

⁴³ This group was organised thirty years before Ryu started to teach, and the first president of Republic of the Korea, Yi Süngman (president 1948-1960), also taught at this group. Park Yönggho, *Ssial*, 119.

⁴⁴ We do not know who the three geniuses were at that period. Park Yönggho, *Tasöck Ryu Yöngmo üi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 211.

Kkaedalŭm. He desperately needed a place where he could speak freely, having lost the teaching position that he had resumed at Osan school, where he had been appointed principal in 1921. In 1922 he was forced out of his position by the Japanese,⁴⁵ and it was among the members of the *yŏngyŏng* group that he found a receptive audience. Park Yŏngho captured Ryu's empathy with the group in the maxim by which he described their relationship: "People who have a real heart definitely possess some truth."⁴⁶ He added: "Those who want to talk are persons who throw up a blaze of thought in their mind. People who are seeking the truth want to talk."⁴⁷ It was due to such intense relationships that this group proved to be a place where Ryu was able to elaborate the essentials of his *Kkaedalŭm*.

For this reason, he continued teaching here despite various difficulties. Though many patriots fled Korea for refuge in Russia, China, and the USA, the YMCA continued to provide a haven where others could meet until it was itself closed in 1938 by Japanese forces. Even then, when official events were entirely prohibited, the group continued meeting clandestinely.⁴⁸ During the maelstrom of the Korean War (1950-1953), its conversations carried on in shelters.⁴⁹ The superhuman feat of maintaining this group through such crises was itself a testimony to Ryu's belief in 'here' and 'now'; to quote a relevant remark from his diaries, "Ryu Yŏngmo of today exists only now, neither yesterday nor tomorrow."⁵⁰

The content of Ryu's theology will be the focus of the following chapters, Chapters 4 to 6. Unfortunately Ryu has left us with very little evidence of the evolution of this thought. While his lectures to the *yŏngyŏng* group continued over thirty-five years,

⁴⁵ Ham Sŏkhŏn was a great religious thinker, educator, and fighter for social movements. He carried on with Ryu's thought, *Ssial*, developed a unique thought of life and history, and authored a number of books. He was also nominated for the Nobel Prize for peace twice.

⁴⁶ See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 275-293.

⁴⁷ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's life and thought), Vol. 1, 211.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 221.

⁴⁹ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 235.

⁵⁰ Kim Hŭngho, *Chesori*, 91.

the only record he made of them was in the diaries that he wrote at the end of his life. Suffice it to say in this biographical review, that his earliest lectures were devoted to discussion of the Gospel of John in the light of Korean religious thought, and Lao-tzu. It was his ability to think inter-religiously that impressed his audience. Kim Kyosin (김교신, 金敎臣) commented on this in a publicity article for the *yöngyöng* group in *Söngsö Chosön* as follows:

In these days, there are so many people who refer to their unique opinions. However, I have never seen a person like Ryu Yöngmo, who has a deep knowledge and unique view of the Bible in Korea. As a trueborn Korean, he has a thorough knowledge of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, exalted ideas of Buddhist scriptures, and at the same time can discourse on the Bible of Christianity. It is impossible to find another like him, so I cannot help recommending him, and there is no other chance to meet somebody like him except at the meeting of *yöngyöng* group.⁵¹

It is clear that the thought and beliefs of Ryu always surpassed the standard, whatever difficulties confronted the members of the group. He was a mastermind who never neglected his studies or belief during the national crises and troubles, and he transmitted his thought to his disciples ceaselessly and with enthusiasm.

It was through the workings of this group that Ryu emerged as a sage. Yu Talyöng said, "It is not incorrect to refer to Ryu as a sage who far surpasses Confucius."⁵² It was also among the members of the group that the first disciples of Ryu emerged. Yu Talyöng defined Ryu as the ideal model for his followers. Taking Ham Sökhön as an example, he remarked: "Ham Sökhön always tries to be the exact counterpart of Ryu: that is, to wear Korean traditional costumes for life, to grow a moustache, to eat one meal a day, and to count the days of one's life."⁵³ Park Yönggho also claims that Ham Sökhön was trying to reproduce not only Ryu's spirit but also his appearance.

⁵¹ Kim Kyosin, "Söngsöhoe (성서회, Advertisement of Bible study)", *Söngsö Chosön* (성서조선), No. 45, October 1932.

⁵² Park Yönggho, *Tasök Ryu Yöngmo üi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 214.

⁵³ Park Yönggho ed., *Tongbangüi Songin : Tasök Ryu Yöngmo* (동방의 성인: 다석 유영모, Eastern Saint : Ryu Yöngmo)

Hyŏn Dongwan, who first convened the group at the request of the YMCA president, Yi Sŭngman, also came to recognise Ryu as a sage and modelled the rest of his life upon his example.

Among members of the group who declared themselves to be Ryu's disciples, special mention should be made of Ham Sŏkhŏn and Kim Kyosin. Each represented different theological tendencies: Ham Sŏkhŏn was more a reformer, whereas Kim Kyosin was a traditionalist in his wish to preserve traditional Korean beliefs and religions. Ham Sŏkhŏn was more faithful to the details of Ryu's, thought and behaviour, and the essence of his belief. Whenever Ham gave a lecture, he cannot help but mentioning Ryu and to attribute his ideas to him. Kim Kyosin, by contrast, was open to wider influences and took a different position from Ryu on some central issues: for example, he admitted to the influence of the Japanese non-church (or Para church) movement of Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930), and held a more traditional understanding of the divinity of Jesus, in distinction from Ryu's 'great master' Christology. Kim founded his own journal, *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*, for the dissemination of his ideas, but it was in this journal that he spoke of the surpassing quality of Ryu's teaching. The diversity of ideas that were embodied in Ryu's disciples is eloquent evidence of his refusal to impose his own ideas on them. Debate was the lifeblood of the *yŏngyŏng* group, and loyalty among its members arose from the mutual respect of different held views. Yu Talyŏng, a disciple of Kim Kyosin, recalled the relationship between Kim Kyosin and Ryu as follows:

Even though, like water and fire, their beliefs – orthodoxy and non-orthodoxy – are quite distinct, the two of them trust and respect each other, and live together in a thorny path. It is impossible to find another relationship like theirs in this world.⁵⁴

After losing his job as Principal of Osan school, Ryu earned his living by working in the cotton factory that his father had set up. His father died in 1933, and following the three-year period of mourning required by Confucian customs of filial respect, he

⁵⁴ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 203.

decided to move to a village and take up farming.⁵⁵ He began to cultivate land at Kugi⁵⁶ township. This gave practical expression to an important insight he drew from the example of Jesus: though not himself a farmer, Jesus used metaphors of the cultivation of the land in several of his parables, and often withdrew from the town to the countryside to pray. “It is only a farmer who sincerely loves God and neighbours,” he remarked in his diary.⁵⁷ Farming he saw as a means of cultivating the mind as much as the land, and of awakening the mind to the truth of nature. He maintained his belief in ‘today’ and exercised his belief in the course of nature by doing farm work. He prayed with his mind by meditating on nature, recalling that Jesus often went to a mountain to pray. He also believed that physical labour could be a form of prayer with the body, so he worked hard on the land.⁵⁸

Although he continued meeting with the *yŏngyŏng* group from his new place of work, the hard physical labour of farming made it impossible to express his ideas in writing. But he also had a disinclination to put forward his views in writing while his teacher, Kim Chŏngsik, was alive. Respect for his teacher constrained him from publishing and thus publicising his own ideas. It was only when Kim died, followed by the death of another friend, Mun Ilp’yŏng, that Ryu agreed to begin publishing his own thoughts, firstly by way of valedictory articles for his teacher and his friend.⁵⁹ These were published in *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*, and were followed by a series of articles in the same journal, in the course of which Ryu firmly established his own belief and view of theology.

⁵⁵ This custom derived from *Non-ŏ* (논어, 論語, Analects of Confucius), which says that a son should follow the father’s will when the father is alive, and should not change the father’s will for three years after the father dies. This can be called filial piety. See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol., 137-145.

⁵⁶ The exact name of the place was Koyang Kun, Ŭnp’yŏng Myŏn, Kugi Ri, and this is now in the Seoul area.

⁵⁷ Pak Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 146.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁹ It was rare for Ryu to publish an article. Kim Kyosin called him ‘a mental miser’.

F. Putting His View of Religion into Practice (1941-1955)

The next stage of Ryu's life was marked by his decision, on 17th February 1941, to commit himself to an ascetic lifestyle by eating only one meal a day, and by declaring the revocation of his marriage so called 'hoehon' (회혼, literally means to cut off physical affairs). Revocation of marriage did not mean divorce, but rather the continuation of married life without sexual intercourse. This is a practice that Tolstoi himself adopted,⁶⁰ and it reminds us also of the example of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948), who, at the age of thirty-seven, announced that the basis of his marriage was to change from a husband-wife relationship to that of brother and sister.

Ryu explained these decisions in an article entitled "The Decision to Be Reached", where he interpreted them in terms of the need to discipline and diminish human physical appetites as part of the journey of *Kkaedalŭm*.⁶¹ He regarded this year – 1941 – as the spring of his life, in which he was able to take a major step in the process of self-cultivation: he likened it in another article to the "Joy of Thawing".

These decisions evidence the importance that Ryu placed on the relationship between belief and practice. This entailed more than the obvious principle of putting belief into practice. It emphasised rather that the transformation of one's lifestyle is itself a source of purer insight into the nature of faith that inspires the change in the first place. Faith and practice therefore exist in a reciprocal relationship of mutual inspiration. In an article entitled "Entering the Practice of Belief Thirty-eight Years after Being Called", he likened his transformation of lifestyle to a rebirth. By coincidence this took place exactly thirty-eight years after he first began to believe in God (1905-1942): this led him to reflect on the parallel between his own experience and that of the man at the Pool of Bethesda in the Gospel of John (5:1-15), who had

⁶⁰ Janko Lavrin, *Tolstoy: An Approach*, 116-131.

⁶¹ "Life in this world is like a plucked string, a sonorous sound but one that will be stopped soon...life is an irrevocable judgment of ruin.... therefore think and discuss with your deep deep mind and heart, and reach the decision with your lips firmly closed and nodding in assent." In Ryu Yŏngmo, "Kyŏljŏnghami issŭra (결정함이 있으라, The decision has to be reached)", *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* (성서조선), No. 135, April 1940, 76.

been infirm for thirty-eight years until Jesus healed him and he was made whole. Ryu interpreted this as a parable of *Kkaedalŭm*, and wrote: “I do follow Jesus, but if my strength for practice does not come from Him, Jesus cannot be my only Lord.” His rebirth was his guarantee that following the way of Jesus did indeed give him new strength and new appreciation of the Truth: “the name of Jesus gives me an abundant power of life through the truth of the Holy Spirit today.”⁶² Rebirth therefore marked the height of *Kkaedalŭm*, where after Ryu surrendered himself to God unconditionally and decided to give up the attachments of this relative world and to live through faith alone. The severing of appetite and sexual desire was, in his view, essential to a life orientated toward God, and to this end he modelled a style of self-cultivation that distinguished him from those whose primary concern was to satisfy their physical appetites.⁶³

The *Kkaedalŭm* of rebirth led Ryu to an intensified experience of self-abandonment in God. This is eloquently expressed in the following quotations.

For a year God kept asking me, “Do you want to be healed?” (John, 5:6). I ignored this because I felt there was nobody to hold me. I hated people saying, “Is he so weak that he needs somebody to hold him? He is also an unworthy person.” I eagerly wanted to keep my independent honour. Today, I eventually admit that I am merely nothing, but I do not have a chance to confess and surrender to the Lord.⁶⁴

Having surrendered himself to God, Ryu expressed his sense of being united with God in a poetic piece of writing that he called “The Song of a Person of Belief”:

I do not have any cares, there are no troubles from now on. He holds me and takes me up. He has me. I abandon my body and face. I throw away all that belongs to me. My worries – ‘what do I have to do before I die?’, ‘What can I say about others?’ – are all gone. A newly-born body wears ‘His Word’ and a newly born face can see this cosmos, and all the myriad things that exist. Although I look for

⁶² Ryu Yŏngmo, “Purŭsinji 38 nyŏnmane midŭme tŭrŏgam (부르신지 38년만에 믿음에 들어감, Entering the Practice of Belief Thirty-eight Years after Being Called)”, 9-13.

⁶³ Kim Hŭngho, *Chesori* (Seoul: P’ungman, 1983), 29.

⁶⁴ Ryu Yŏngmo, “Purŭsinji 38 nyŏnmane midŭme tŭrŏgam (부르신지 38년만에 믿음에 들어감, Entering the Practice of Belief Thirty-eight Years after Being Called)”, 9-13.

myself in every likely place in this world, I cannot find myself. A person who does not exist in this world, glittering! a light! (John, 1:4) That is the face for Him, and that is the body for Word. This face is for contemplating Him, and this body is for reading His Words. This face is for loving Him, and this body is for looking up to His Will. Amen.⁶⁵

For those familiar with the story of St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, Ryu's rebirth invites comparison as his 'Damascus experience'. The significant difference, however, is that Ryu interpreted his experience not as evidence of God's sudden intervention in his life, but rather as a radical stage on his journey of *Kkaedalŭm* along the *tao* of self-cultivation. This was entirely consistent with his East Asian way of thinking. From this day, Ryu started to sleep on a wooden board, and always knelt rather than sat. Park Yŏngho interprets these habits as symbols of Ryu's constant awareness of his death which, by being thus remembered, was overcome through the practice of *Kkaedalŭm*.⁶⁶

It is therefore difficult to agree with the opinion of Kim Kyosin, among others, who interpret Ryu's rebirth as a return to traditional Christianity.⁶⁷ This interpretation is based on the fact that, as we have seen, Ryu quoted many phrases from the Bible when discussing re-birth in his articles, and speaks more appreciatively of orthodox theological doctrines as expressed in the Apostles' Creed than he had in the past. Park Yŏngmo offers a different explanation, however: namely, that Ryu was always haunted by Kim Kyosin's sincere personality and his orthodox faith, and wished to be sensitive to the latter in the interests of the close personal relations.⁶⁸ He insists that the articles that Ryu wrote for *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* should be understood in terms of establishing the relation of master and disciple between himself and Kim Kyosin. This is evidence of Ryu's empathy with his friend, rather than of a change in his own

⁶⁵ Ryu Yŏngmo, "Purŭsinji 38 nyŏnmane midŭme tŭrŏgam (부르신지 38년만에 믿음에 들어감, Entering the Practice of Belief Thirty-eight Years after Being Called)", 9-13.

⁶⁶ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 2, 20-24.

⁶⁷ See Ch'oi Insik, *Tawŏnjuŭi Sidaeu Kyohoe wa Sinhak* (다원주의 시대의 교회와 신학, Church and Theology in a Pluralistic Age).

⁶⁸ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 294-295.

theological position. Indeed, on the basis of the research for this thesis, the present writer would affirm Park Yŏngho's opinion that Ryu's thought and attitudes did not change at all after the experience of rebirth.⁶⁹

There is evidence, however, of one area of change in Ryu's public stance after his rebirth. In contrast to the position of non-participation that he adopted toward the 1st March 1919 Movement, he returned to an articulate nationalism that opposed Japanese colonialism. Many of his articles in *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn* were explicitly nationalistic. In March 1942 Kim Kyosin wrote an editorial that incurred Japanese wrath and led the Japanese authorities to take measures against the journal and arrest its main contributors and readers. Among the many casualties of this affair, Ryu and his son Ŭisang were arrested, and were kept in jail for nearly sixty days.⁷⁰ From this incident onward, Ryu identified himself with the suffering of the Korean nation. The Japanese colonial period, the chaos after independence in 1945, the Korean war in 1950, and the rule of the US military government inflicted immense suffering and confusion on Korea. Yet through the maelstrom of these national crises, the meetings of the *yŏngyŏng* group continued, and Ryu remained resolute in the teaching and practice of his belief.

G. Preparing for Death (1955-1981)

In 1955, in a YMCA lecture, Ryu announced the estimated date of his death, 26th April 1956. In fact, he had lived every single day as if it were the first and last day of his life.⁷¹ This declaration was closely related to the death of Kim Kyosin on 25th April 1945. Ryu predicted the date of his death by adding eleven years – the difference between his age and that of Kim Kyosin – to the date of the latter's death. By coincidence, this lifespan was the same as that of his teacher, Yi Sŭnghun. This

⁶⁹ In particular, lectures by his disciples and Ryu's diaries show this fact clearly.

⁷⁰ No Ch'ijun, *Iljeha Hanguk Kidoggyo Minjok Undong Yŏngu* (일제하 한국기독교 민족운동 연구, Study of the Korean Christian independence movement under the Japanese occupation) (Seoul: Hanguk Kidoggyo yŏksa yŏnguso, 1993), 29.

⁷¹ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 298.

prompted Ryu to remark:

The life in days that I guessed is the same as that of my dead teacher. How can this happen in the human world? Probably I was awakened and taught by God, so I could have guessed it.⁷²

Ryu's prediction of the date of his death perplexed most people, including his disciples.⁷³ When the prediction turned out to be incorrect, some made it a point of derision. Ryu retorted: "When we spend money, we make an estimate: an estimate cannot perfectly match up to what we spend. If some is left, save it, and if some more is needed, add it; however we still need a plan, and the same is true of life."⁷⁴ In addition, at a Friday lecture at the YMCA on 27th May 1957, he told his disciples:

The 26th April 1956 was the day that I wanted to die, and today is just one year after that day. Today, I conducted my funeral and *sosang* [소상, 小祥, the first anniversary of the death of a person] by myself. And maybe I will conduct my *taesang* [대상, 大祥, the second anniversary of a death] by myself. But this is not the problem. The important thing is to believe in God and live for Him. Life then becomes simple. If we acknowledge God and live for Him, it is fine even not to know other things. To acknowledge *Han-a* is enough.⁷⁵

The point that Ryu seems here to have been making is that, in relation to *Kkaedalŭm*, estimating the date of one's death is important not as a prediction but rather as a volition to live in a state of readiness for death. Ryu lived in this state of expectancy for a further twenty years after first predicting his death. It was during these years that he kept his diary which, far more than a record of his days, comprised a penetrating self-reflection in constant readiness for death. This shows that Ryu's discipline of self-cultivation had been liberated from the 'fatal uncertainty' that death otherwise connotes, and that he was freed to continue his selfless search for relationship with God.

⁷² Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 300.

⁷³ A disciple, Kim Hŭngho, felt the necessity of recording Ryu's lectures before his death, so he let a professional stenographer record Ryu's lectures by 1961. This record provides an important resource with which to study Ryu's thought and belief. And this is the original material of *Tasŏk-ŏrok*.

⁷⁴ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 306.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

To this end he committed the last years of his life to ceaseless study. To deepen further his appreciation of the religions of Korea, he devoted much of his time to the translation of their sacred texts. Characteristic of his self-defacing manner, he likened himself in this study as a beggar who seeks nourishment from the scriptures of the world's religions: "Since I am badly off, I cannot eat properly so I beg for bread from here and there. Thus, I am eating not only the Bible but also Confucian and Buddhist scriptures."⁷⁶ In 1959 he translated the *Tao-te ching* (도덕경) of Lao-tzu, and the Buddhist *Prajñāparamita Sūtra* (반야바라밀다심경, the essence of *Prajñāparamita* [Perfection of Wisdom] writings). The following year he translated the Psalms from Hebrew to Korean, and numerous Confucian texts, such as the Analects of Confucius, the Book of Changes (역경, 易經), the Book of History (서경, 書經), and Chu Tun-yi's Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate (태극도설, 太極圖說).⁷⁷

In 1977, Ryu twice left home in an attempt to die, as Tolstoi did.⁷⁸ He mentioned it as follows:

If you want to be radiant with glory, you should awake, break down and die as in 'Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. This is the Will of the Father, God. To live and die is like saying 'a seed comes to earth for dying'; so I came to this world for dying.⁷⁹

On 3rd February 1981 he returned to God, for whom he was waiting his whole life.

It is important to recognise that to the end of his life Ryu not only reached the state of *Kkaedalŭm* but also made every effort to put his *Kkaedalŭm* into action, even being quite willing to die. Thus, eating one meal a day and revoking marriage were practices symbolic of Ryu's thought and belief.

⁷⁶ Park Yŏngho, *Ssial*, 237.

⁷⁷ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 2. 167.

⁷⁸ Henry Gifford, *Tolstoy*, 71-74.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

H. Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to review the life of Ryu Yŏngmo in the context of Korea in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with reference to the tribulations of a nation whose national life was complicated by external aggressions that led ultimately to political division and civil war. Ryu Yŏngmo was intensely aware of the crisis through which his nation was passing, and his whole life was marked by a strong nationalist sentiment. In contrast to those who express their nationalism through political activity, Ryu chose the path of religious and spiritual self-cultivation, modelling in his own life what he hoped for his nation as a whole. In large part this chapter has offered a study of *Kkaedalŭm*, ‘awakening’, which was the central feature of Ryu’s own religious life. This entailed the voluntary death of personal ambitions, a ‘dying of the self’, in order that the reborn self could live entirely for God. In this way he overcame the fears and anxieties of physical death through a ‘counting of the days’ of his life, living each day as part of an eternal relationship with God.

The second key element of Ryu’s *Kkaedalŭm* was his engagement with the religions of Korea. He experienced and interpreted *Kkaedalŭm* in terms of his Christian faith, that is, his faith in God as exemplified in Jesus of whom he was a committed disciple. But like Tolstoi, this led Ryu to criticise Christian orthodoxy and to break away from the institutional church. Ryu saw the exploration of other religions’ perceptions of truth as essential to his own process of self-cultivation. In this manner he affirmed the positive value of Korean religious pluralism at a time when the Korean nation needed to draw on all its moral and spiritual resources in the struggle for survival.

The greater significance of Ryu’s *Kkaedalŭm* for the present study, however, is what it represents in terms of his articulation of a local Christian theology. It was for theological, not only nationalist reasons that Ryu found it impossible to continue in the religious tradition of Protestant Christianity that the Western Protestant missionaries represented. Their exclusivist theology threatened to cut the Korean

Christians off from the spiritual resources of the traditional religions of Korean history and culture. Disastrous as Ryu believed this would be in socio-political terms for a Korean church, isolated from its wider religious context, he believed yet more passionately that it would diminish the quality of Christian faith itself, and condemn it to both 'foreignness' and spiritual poverty in the Korean context. It was to the traditional theological perspectives of Wŏnhyo and Yi I that Ryu turned to find his own theological orientations, and fertile soil for reinterpreting Christianity in the Korean context. It is with the theological implications of Ryu's *Kkaedalŭm* that the chapters in Part Two of this thesis are concerned.

Part Two

Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology

Chapter Four. *Han'uhnim* (한웅님): Ryu Yŏngmo's Understanding of God

A. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to clarify Ryu Yŏngmo's understanding of God, with particular reference to the term which he devised to express his most mature thinking about God, namely *Han'uhnim* (한웅님). The coining of this term for God was the outcome of his ceaseless struggle to develop an authentically Korean Christian understanding of God, and understanding that is local in the sense of its being coherent with the concepts of God found in the indigenous religious traditions of Korea, notably Buddhism and Confucianism. For Ryu, seeking a local name for God was essential for the identity of Christianity in Korea. He wished to escape the epistemological hegemony that Western missionaries imposed on the ways that God is named in the Korean language, and saw this as a fundamental requisite for an authentic local theology.

The chapter will first examine the various names of God that are used in the Korean context. We shall then proceed to demonstrate that Ryu tried to harmonise the theological suppositions within these terms in his own word for God, *Han'uhnim*. The evidence of this harmonisation will be drawn firstly from Ryu's effort to integrate the different words for God as used in the Protestant and Catholic traditions of Korean Christianity – *Hananim* and *Hanūnim* respectively. In order to understand Ryu's own theological concept of *Han'uhnim*, the chapter will also examine the way in which he drew from the metaphysical insights of both Buddhism and Confucianism in his own interpretation of *Hana*, the One God.

B. *Han'uhnim* (한웅님) as the Name of God in Ryu's Thought

1. The Name of God in Korean Christianity

Any discussion of Ryu's understanding of God must scrutinise his characteristic term

for God, *Han'uhnim*. This in turn requires an examination of the historical problem of naming God in the Korean language, or more accurately, of finding a term by which God is named in a way that is both faithful to the Biblical understanding of God and accurate to the linguistic characteristics of the Korean language. A brief examination of the difficulties that Korean Christians have had in this respect underlines a fundamental problem facing local theology. The ways in which God has been named in Korean reflect decisions of non-Koreans, reflecting either Chinese precedents or Western missionary inventions. This presents the local theologian with severe problems and underlines what Schreiter has identified as the difficulties of the beginning point of local theology.¹ Ryu recognised this problem by the fact that he used several names for God in his lecturing and writing, but he also attempted to resolve the problem by coining his own term, *Han'uhnim*, in an effort to create an indigenous understanding of the Biblical and Christian concept of God. Thus, while not entirely rejecting the existing names of God in Korean Christianity, he preferred to use his own term, *Han'uhnim*, and the first task of this chapter is to explore what he meant by it.

To do so, it is necessary to begin with a brief overview of the history of terms used for God in Korean Christianity. The first Korean translation of the Bible (1892) used the term *Syang Tye* (상떼) for God. According to the Sino-Korean phoneticisation that was used at this time in Chosŏn, this was the equivalent of the Chinese characters *Sang Che* (上帝, [Shang ti]), which was the term that was used for God in Chinese Christianity, going back to the sixteenth century Jesuit missionaries when Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) first adopted the term from the Confucian classics to translate the Biblical terms for God. By the early twentieth century, *Syang Tye* was rendered in Korean as *Sang Che* (상제), according to slight changes in the Korean characters. In English translation this term can be rendered 'Lord of Heaven', expressing the idea of a personal God who is 'sovereign on high'. *Sang Che* is often used interchangeably with *Ch'ŏn Chu* (천주, 天主), 'Lord of Heaven', but it is

¹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 26.

the latter that has now established itself in Catholic usage.²

An alternative name for God was introduced into Protestant Christian terminology in 1924, when the word *Hananim* (하나님) was first used in the Korean Bible. This was the term that was preferred by most American missionaries. It is a compound of *hauna* (하나), meaning 'One', and the honorific suffix *nim* (님) which roughly equivalent to the English term 'Lord'. Hence, the missionaries used the *Hananim* to mean 'the Great One' or 'the One Lord', emphasising Biblical monotheism in accordance with the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before Me" (*Exodus* 20:2-3). By the change of a single vowel *Hananim* can be pronounced *Hanŭnim* which is the compound of *hanau* (하늘) meaning 'heaven' and the honorific suffix *nim* (님). Most Protestant missionaries rejected this second term because of their fear that it divinised heaven and associated the term with the shamanistic pantheon of Korean tradition. The two words were debated among the missionaries in the early twentieth century. James Gale (1863-1937) and Charles Clark (1878-1961) both argued for *Hananim* on grounds of its being more accurate to the Biblical teaching of the oneness and unity of God,³ while Homer Hulbert (1863-1949) favoured *Hanŭnim*, arguing that the Confucian concept of Heaven was equivalent to the monotheistic God of the Judeo-Christian tradition.⁴ The publication of the 1924 *Revised Hangŭl Bible* established *Hananim*, and this has remained the Protestant Korean word for God ever since. Korean Catholics, on the other hand, have adopted the *Hanŭnim* option which more closely expresses in Hangŭl the Sino-Korean term *Ch'ŏn Chu*. An attempt to reconcile these two traditions in the 1977 *Kongdong Pŏnyŏk*, 'Ecumenical Translation', by using term *Hanŭnim* on grounds that it honoured both the Protestant emphasis on unity and the Catholic emphasis on heaven, provoked renewed

² Matteo Ricci used this term, *Ch'ŏn Chu*, as the name of God in his book, *T'ien-chu Shih-I* (天主實義, *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven*) in the early seventeenth century. The term 'Sovereign on High' also appears in this book. See Matteo Ricci S.J., *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven* (Paris: Institut Ricci, 1985), 59.

³ Charles A. Clark, *Religions in Old Korea* (N.Y.: Fleming Revell Co., 1929), 116-117.

⁴ Shin Yŏngbok, *Taehajeuk Myŏlmangsa* (대한제국 멸망사, *The Fall of the Taehan Empire*) (Seoul: P'yŏngminsa, 1994), 389-390.

controversy. Conservative Protestant Christians rejected *Hanŭnim* and insisted that only *Hananim* is acceptable, and this has remained the standard Protestant term. The Korean Catholics continue to use *Hanŭnim*.

2. Ryu Yŏngmo and the Korean Language as the Vehicle for Local Theology

The foregoing discussion of the tortuous history of the naming of God in Korean Christian history confirms Yi Changsik's opinion that "these terms correspond to some aspects of the Biblical concept of God, but neither of them is sufficient to comprehend or convey the theological meaning of God in its fullness."⁵ The theological inadequacy of each term also points to another problem: namely, that the choice of one term or the other reveals different attitudes towards local culture, the preference for *Hananim* accentuating a theological distinction between the Biblical concept of monotheism and local understandings of the Absolute, while *Hanŭnim* corresponds to the Confucian concept of Heaven.

Ryu Yŏngmo was extremely sensitive to these problems on both linguistic and theological grounds. His speaking and writing was marked by an eloquent command of the Korean language, and it is clear that he found the flexibility of the language conducive to exploring and expressing his theological concepts. Northrop's distinction between the way language is used in the East and the West applies in this case: the West, he argues, conceives language as "a differentiated aesthetic continuum", while in the East language is "an undifferentiated aesthetic continuum."⁶ Ryu's approach to language was flexible in that he was prepared to use a wide variety of words to express a single idea: his continuity of thought lay not in the differentiated meaning of individual words, but in their aesthetic effect upon the mind of both their author and their recipient. The suggestive power of words has an

⁵ Yi Changsik, "Hananim ch'ingho ŭi sinhakjŏk kŭn'gŏ (하나님 칭호의 신학적 근거, A Theological Foundation of the Name of God), *Kisang* (기상), 80. 7., 128.

⁶ F. S. C. Northrop mentions in his book, *The Meeting of East and West*, that the linguistic characteristic of the West, "the differentiated aesthetic continuum", differs from that of the East, the so-called "undifferentiated aesthetic continuum". This is because there is a difficulty between East and West in terms of their linguistic systems. Accordingly, there are two distinctive linguistic worlds. See F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), 333.

importance beyond their dictionary definitions. The following poetic extract from Ryu's diary illustrates his approach to the use of language:

Mal (word)!⁷ Let me ask *mal*. I tied up *mal* which I am riding to you. I should untie the *mal* which I ride. But I have to choose, analyse, and discern the *mal* that I ride.⁸

Ryu is here playing on the double meaning of the term *mal* as 'word' and 'horse'. For both meanings the term is written and pronounced in the same way. He thus suggests that a word is like a horse, something to be unleashed and ridden, verbal eloquence being the equivalent of equine elegance. Ryu was concerned that the words he used should communicate with his audience, and to this end he was pragmatic in choosing words to convey Christian ideas. He thought it more important that his choice of words should express meaning intelligibly in the local Korean context, encouraging Koreans to faith, than that they should accurately render into Korean the traditional theological terminology of Western Christianity. As Kim Youngoak has pointed out, this pragmatic approach to the language reflects the functional value of language in Eastern thought. Language is not used for the purpose of abstract knowledge, but for the practical communication and application of knowledge. It cultivates a philosophical attitude that focuses on the real issues of a balanced mental and physical human life.⁹ To assert that Ryu valued language pragmatically for its power of communication and application is not to diminish his sense of the inherent quality of language itself. He was immensely proud of the Korean language and believed that it was an excellent medium for the communication of religious truth, including Christian truth, in the Korean context. In this he differed from most academic circles in Korea, which preferred to use

⁷ The terms, horse and word, are both pronounced *mal* in Korean.

⁸ In original text: 말아 말 므로 보자 나 타고 갈 말 네게 맏스니 / 내 프러내 내가 타고 나 갈 말을 네게 탈다 / 고르르 된 말슴이기 가려보믄 되리라 (1956. 2. 5.). Another interpretation is also possible as follows: *Mal* (horse)! Let me ask *mal* (word). I tied up *mal* (horse) which I am riding to you. I should untie the *mal* (horse) which I ride. But I have to choose, analyse, and discern the *mal* (horse) that I ride.

⁹ Kim Youngoak, *Tongyanghak Ottök'e Halgösinga* (동양학 어떻게 할 것인가, How to Do Eastern Studies) (Seoul: T'ongnamu, 1997), 310.

European or Chinese terms. For Ryu, dependence on such extraneous languages was neither suited to, nor appropriate for a local theology: Korean theology should be expressed in the Korean language. Thus he insisted that the use of Korean characters, *Hangŭl* (한글), was not only legitimate for Christian theology, but indeed offered the best way to express it in the Korean cultural idiom.¹⁰ Kim Hŭngho remarks, in his interpretation of *Tasŏk-ilji* (다석일지), that Ryu considered the Korean language to be a revelation of God and that *Hunmin-jŏngŭm* (훈민정음) – the original name for *Hangŭl*, literally meaning the right sounds for teaching people – is a heavenly language.¹¹ Thus, continuing his play on the double meaning of *mal*, he wrote:

Mal (word)! Let me ask *mal*. Since I tie up the *mal* which I will ride, I untie it, and ride and ascend on high.¹²

But if, through these poetic metaphors, Ryu justified his use of *Hangŭl* as a language capable of communicating transcendent truth, he was also conscious of the limitations of the human use of any language in relation to God. On the specific issue of naming God, he wrote:

Inherently God has no name. We cannot name God. If we can name God, it is not God but an idol.¹³

Because God exceeds comprehension, language – even as a mediation between heaven and humanity – cannot convey absolute meaning. Language is always limited in relation to meaning. To minimise its limitations, the theologian needs also to be a

¹⁰ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 유영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 2, 141-142. Park Yŏngho points out twenty pure Korean words where Ryu has restored the meaning, among eighty words that he invented or discovered. A Korean theologian, Ch'ae Suil, places a high value on Ryu's contribution toward the development of Korean words, and Ryu's efforts are a most significant improvement which opens the possibility that theology can be done on the basis of Korean characters.

¹¹ Park Yŏngho insists that Ryu also agrees that Korean characters, *Hangŭl*, are composed by the revelation of God. Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 유영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 2, 134.

¹² In original text: 말아 말 뜨러 보자 / 나 갈 말 네게 매스니 / 뜨러 내 다러 타고 오름 (*Tasŏk-ilji*, 1956.3.11)

¹³ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 34. In original text: 신은 본디 이름이 없다. 신에 이름을 붙일 수 가 없다. 신에 이름을 붙이면 이미 신이 아니요, 우상이다.

linguist, capable of probing the inner recesses of language in order to maximise its communicative potential. The greater one's linguistic capability, the greater also is one's ability to express truth. Ryu therefore gave much of his intellectual energy to learning the languages of the sacred writings of the Korean religions, in order to enhance his capacity to articulate Christian concepts in terms that were functionally communicative within the culture of Korean religious pluralism. In other words, Ryu had two different attitudes toward language: on the one hand he valued language as the means of understanding and communicating divinely revealed truth; on the other he acknowledged the limitations of language and the relativity of each language's capacity to convey Absolute Truth. From this arose his pragmatism, his willingness to use many different terms for the naming of God in order to evoke "an undifferentiated aesthetic continuum" of meaning.

3. The Naming of God in Ryu's Diaries (*Tasŏk-ilji*, 다석일지)

Ryu's life was contemporary with the process of the translation of the Bible into Korean, which was summarised in the first section of this chapter. The aim of the present section is to examine the variety of words that Ryu used for God in his own writing, and particularly to clarify his purpose in coining a new term, *Han'uhnim*, as an attempt to reconcile the differences between *Hananim* and *Hanūnim*.

A cursory reading of Ryu's diaries makes it immediately obvious that he used much wider and more various terms for God than did the Western missionaries or their translations of the Bible. It is clear also that his use of these varied terms was intended to reflect Korean cultural identity, and particularly Korean religious pluralism, more imaginatively than the missionaries were either willing to do or capable of doing. The terms that he used can be grouped into three categories. One group comprises words that derive from Chinese precedents and reflect Confucian concepts of heaven: *Sang Che* (상제), *Chu Chae* (주재), *Chŏldaemu* (절대무), *Chŏn* (天), and *Sin* (神). These terms have the Confucian meaning of Absolute Being. *Sang Che* (상제) was used as the name of God in the parallel Chinese and Korean

translation of the Bible. *Ch'ŏn Chu* (천주) is the official name of God in Catholic tradition in Korea. A second group comprises words of Buddhist origin: notably, *Ŏshigyesin-im* (없이게신 임) 'the existent without being' which is honoured by the suffix *im*, and *Chŏldaemu* (절대무), which expresses the concept of 'Absolute Nothingness'.¹⁴

It is a third group of terms, however, which is most characteristic of Ryu's ways of naming God in Korean. This group includes *Hananim* (하나님) which, as we have seen, is the term most widely used by Korean Protestants to conveying the concept of 'the One'. But it also includes three other terms, *Han'unim* (한우님), *Han'uim* (한우힘), and *Han'uhnim* (한웅님). Each of these terms is closely related to the term *Hanŭnim* (하느님), which the Protestant missionaries had rejected, but each is written with slight differences in *Hangŭl* characters. They are compounds of *han*, 'u or 'uh, and *im* or *nim*. Ryu explains *han* as 'One', but relates its meaning to two other terms: *hwang* (皇) which denotes a noble and lofty being like a 'king' or 'emperor'; and *k'ŭm* (کم), which refers to the unlimited cosmos. Thus, his understanding of 'one' exceeds the simple numerical value of *han* (or *hana*) and implies the One God whose grandeur may tentatively be compared with that of an emperor, but which in reality is infinite, great beyond anything in the finite universe. The transcendent dimension of Ryu's understanding of God is emphasised in the second part of the compound, 'u, which he later wrote as 'uh, to indicate 'that which is above', or heaven. This connects with the shamanistic and Confucian concepts of Heaven which the Protestant missionaries were unwilling to embrace for fear of pantheism. It is with respect to this problem that Ryu devised his own form of the word in *Han'uhmin*, the significance of which will be discussed below.

4. *Hananim* (하나님) and *Han'uhnim* (한웅님)

Given the variety of terms that Ryu uses of God in his diaries, it is not surprising that

¹⁴ For example, John Ross (1842-1915) could not help referring to the Chinese Bibles when he made the first translation into Korean, 'Yesu Syŏnggyo Chyŏnsŏ (예수성경교전서, 1887)'. *The Institute of Korean Church History Studies, A History of the Korean Church*, Vol. 1., 147.

his disciples used different words in their interpretations of his thought. Kim Hŭngho, in his works *Chesori* (제소리) (1983) and *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo Myŏngsangrok* (다석 유영모 명상록) (1998), uses the term *Hananim* (하나님) and implies that this was Ryu's preferred way of referring to the transcendent being. On the other hand, Park Yŏngho uses *Han'anim* (한아님) in *Tasŏk-ŏrok* (다석어록) (1993) and also uses *Hanŭnim* (하느님) in other books. The argument which the present writer wants to advance is that neither of these terms is truly characteristic of Ryu's thought, and that his preferred term was the one that he coined, *Han'uhnim*. We must now attempt to clarify what Ryu meant by this term.

It must first be acknowledged, however, that Ryu was quite willing to use the regular word for God in Korean Protestant language, *Hananim*. As Hong Sŏngwook points out, the term *Hananim* has the greatest public recognition in contemporary Korea, and fulfils the same function as the term God in the English-speaking West. But part of Ryu's pragmatism was to recognise that language is always influenced by time and place. The meanings of words are not permanently fixed, and no single word for God has a permanent authority. In particular, he saw that the weakness of the term *Hananim* is that its Protestant usage ignored contextual issues and failed to dialogue with the different religious and philosophical traditions of Korean culture. Therefore, he concluded, the term is but one attempt to express the concept of God in the Korean language, and although it has wide institutional acceptance among Korean Protestant churches, it should not exclude other terms. To absolutise the name of God, as a previous quotation from Ryu's diary has already indicated, is tantamount to idolatry. Absolute identification of God is denied in Korea's indigenous religious traditions, and Ryu believed that it was dangerous for Christians to ignore this. Thus, the term *Hananim* cannot be but limited, in terms of both its meaning and its formation.¹⁵ Since its meaning was fixed by Western missionaries before Korean Christians themselves had the opportunity to debate it in the context of their own

¹⁵ As seen earlier, because of Western missionaries' influence, the name of God in the Korean context had not been fully considered during the process of its formation.

theological experience, the question arises: ‘can the meaning of the term *Hananim* be practically experienced among Koreans when they use it?’

Thus Ryu uses the term *Hananim* relativistically in his diaries. Mainly he uses it when quoting from the Bible, respecting that this was the established usage of most Korean Bible translations of his day. Beyond this, however, he uses the term quite rarely. Where is it found in his articles for journals, it is hard to know whether it was in fact the term that he used when writing, or whether it may have been inserted according to the preference of an editor in order to conform with conventional terminology. What is certain is that Ryu used the word with due respect for existing custom, but also with recognition that it failed to address the fundamental contextual issues with which he was concerned.

It was for this reason that he coined the term *Han'uhnim* which, in the view of the present writer, expresses Ryu's personal understanding of God more accurately than any other term that appears in his writing. In his private diaries, it was the word for God he used more frequently than other terms. It appears for the first time in his diary entry for 10th September 1956. Before this, terms like *Han'unim* (한우님) or *Han'uim* (한우힘) are used.¹⁶ From 1956, however, the word occurs with frequency, and although other terms appear in his articles for journals or in his disciples' articles,¹⁷ no other name of God is found in his writing after 1974. Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that ‘*Han'uhnim*’ lay at the heart of Ryu's ceaseless theological struggle to express his understanding of God in Korean terms, and is the most characteristic expression of his theology, giving him the means of achieving a hermeneutical communication with the indigenous religious traditions of Korea.

As has already been explained, *Han'uhnim* is one of the forms that Ryu developed from the term *Han'unim* (한우님) which links the biblical emphasis of God as ‘the

¹⁶ *Tasŏk-ilji*, Vol.1., 265.

¹⁷ *Hananim* is used when Ryu translates the Bible, and *Sang Che* and *Ch'ŏn Chu* are employed in his Chinese poems.

One’ with the Confucian concept of Heaven, suffixing both with the honorific *nim*. The move to *Han’uhnim* revises the medial element of *Han’unim* from ‘u’ to ‘uh’ as represented in the following symbol:

Figure 1



Commenting on this, Ryu remarked: “I like to use *Han’uhnim* as the name of God because the symbol of ‘uh’ is the same when it is seen the right way up and upside down.”¹⁸ Ryu is here reflecting on the significance of the shape of the symbol: the top circle is a soundless consonant, comparable to the Hebrew *aleph* (marked by ‘); beneath it the horizontal stroke and dot give the ‘u’ vowel; the base of the symbol, marked by a second horizontal with suspended circle represents ‘h’. Each half of the symbol is the inverse of the other. If it is read ‘the right way up’ the symbol denotes heaven as the place ‘above’, echoing the Confucian concept of Heaven in terms of a ‘sky-hierophany’. To read the symbol inversely does not change its shape, or its meaning, but turns upside down the reality that it symbolises. This communicates that the truth of God cannot be captured in a linguistic symbol, and that the divine reality is the inverse of anything the human mind can comprehend. Ryu’s intent in explaining the symbol in this way can be compared with the passage of the *Tao Te Ching* that so much influenced his way of thinking: “The way (*tao*) that can be followed is not the eternal *tao*; the name that can be named is not the eternal name; that which is without name is of heaven and earth the beginning; that which is

¹⁸ Park Yŏnggho ed., *Tongbangŭi Sŏngin : Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo* (동방의 성인: 다석 유영모, Eastern Saint: Ryu Yŏngmo), 197.

nameable is of a myriad things the mother.”¹⁹

Ryu interprets the suffix *nim* in two ways. Firstly is it the honorific way of paying respect to the person denominated in the symbol to which it is attached. It is also a way of showing intimacy, as one would to a friend by adding the suffix *nim* to the person's name. Suffixed here to the word for God, Ryu interprets *nim* as meaning that human beings who name God with such intimacy are capable thereby of being in intimate relationship with God. This subject will be discussed more fully later in the chapter, when Ryu's understanding of the divine-human relationship is investigated.

It is also important to note that while the term *Han'uhnim* appears as a noun form, the individual meaning of each constituent element of the term is an adjective. Ryu greatly preferred to speak of God adjectivally, or descriptively in terms of how God is experienced, rather than to speak of God substantively by way of nouns that seek to express the nature of God. In this manner Ryu avoided the danger of speaking of God dogmatically in favour of seeking an ever deeper understanding of God experientially. This is crucial to the way Ryu approached the task of doing theology.

It is impossible therefore to render the multi-valent meaning of the term *han'uhnim* into an English equivalent. The term 'the Lord of Heaven' captures the literal meaning of the word, but fails to communicate its symbolic value, which is expressed in aesthetic and imaginative rather than literal terms. Rather than attempting to translate it, therefore, it is wiser to note that Ryu interpreted it in terms of 'existence' and 'non-existence', which will be discussed below.

C. *Han'uhnim*, Existence and Non-Existence

1. Ryu's Understanding of God as *Han'uhnim*

Before examining Ryu's theology of God, it is first necessary to understand his

¹⁹ *Tao Te Ching* chapter I. Quoted from Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1936), 141.

method of thinking about God. The Korean scholar Chŏng Sŏngho discusses two ways of cognition²⁰ of the truth, each of which is based on a different epistemology and establishes a distinct framework of knowledge about human beings and the world.²¹ One is based on a rational, scientific way of knowing and depends on empirical evidences to establish what is true. Were this adequate for understanding God, he wonders why human beings are not able to free themselves from the confusing situation which prevails within and among different religious traditions, as part of their contested understandings of themselves and the world in which they live. The fact that human history is characterised by such confusion leads Chŏng Sŏngho to argue that rational and scientific knowledge is limited and conditional and is incapable of leading to a complete knowledge of either physical or metaphysical realities.²² The second type of cognition depends on intuition rather than reason, and on experiential more than scientific evidence. This he sees as fundamentally typical of Eastern thought, especially in its classical formations, in contrast to Western dependence on scientific reason, which has become the hallmark of modern global culture. He refers to this second way of knowing as *kak* (각, 覺) or ‘awakening’.

He demonstrates that this has long been employed as the way of cognition in Eastern traditions, particularly Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. It is not unreasonable to translate it into English as ‘intuition’, ‘enlightenment’, ‘insight’, or ‘higher understanding’. Awakening is indeed an activity of cognition, but it differs from cognitive activities based on reason and experience. According to Chŏng Sŏngho, awakening is an activity which penetrates the ontological and cosmological structures on which rational thought depends. He expresses the concept as follows: *kak* awakens a human being by so penetrating his/her being that s/he becomes one

²⁰ In this context, cognition is a concept that is a wider perception than knowledge and a narrower one than consciousness or intelligence.

²¹ Chŏng Sŏngho, “Kkaedalŭm ūi ch’ŏlhak ūl hyanghayŏ (깨달음의 철학을 향하여, Towards a Philosophy of Awakening), *Ch’olhak*, No. 45 (Winter, 1995), 33.

²² *Ibid.*, 35.

with *kak*.²³

In this understanding, subject and object are united in the act of enlightenment. In other words, enlightenment overcomes the dichotomy between subject and object and unites the two in a single act of knowing.

Chŏng Sŏngho's explanation of *kak* provides a helpful clue to understanding the way in which Ryu proceeds to think about God in his diaries. As has already been discussed in Chapter 3, Ryu's theology is shaped by and within his own experience of *Kkaedalŭm*, the term which he used for 'awakening'. This applies emphatically to his discussion of the meaning of *Han'uhnim*, which is presented in terms of his own experiential knowledge of God through his relationship with God as awakened by the process of *Kkaedalŭm*.

This leads him to speak of God in a pattern of three metaphors that express his experiential understanding of the human-divine relationship that penetrates and unites both subject and object. The first metaphor turns on a *hangŭl* ideogram, *kŭt* (𠔁), which Ryu created to picture his understanding of the divine-human relationship; the second elaborates this on the analogy of the Confucian ideal of the father-son relationship and filial piety; the third draws out the significance of another ideogram, comprised of the first two Korean characters, *kiyŏk* and *niŭn*, which he links with a dot, and thus calls *Kaon-tchiggi* (가온찍기), literally 'placing a dot in the middle'.

In order to understand the first metaphor, it is necessary to explain the symbolic shape of the ideogram *kŭt* (𠔁).

Figure 2

²³ Chŏng Sŏngho, "Kkaedalŭm ūi ch'ŏlhak ūl hyanghayŏ (깨달음의 철학을 향하여, Towards a Philosophy of Awakening), 35.



The ideogram as such has no meaning. But Ryu devised it as a way of symbolising his own understanding of the divine-human relationship. He explains it as follows in his diary:

Kūt (𠄎) is me. I am *kūt* (𠄎). The eternal life of *kūt* (𠄎) is me. The horizontal line (一) of *kūt* (𠄎) is the world. What is beneath the horizontal line (人)²⁴ indicates human beings. What is above the line (7) is the spirit that comes from heaven, and human beings are created when this spirit strikes the ground.²⁵

Ryu used this symbol as a metaphor of his own experience of his *Kkaedalūm* that gave him assurance of a relationship with God in which subject and object were united by the process of enlightenment that emanated from God and penetrated and transformed his (Ryu's) own being. In terms of theological elaboration he understood this to mean that human beings originate from the eternal life of God in the spatial-temporal terms of heaven and earth. As symbolised in the character of *kūt* (𠄎), God and human beings cannot be separated from one another: human beings are eternally related to God, because God is eternally the source of human life. What is true of human beings is true of creation as a whole. Therefore human beings do not exist autonomously, but inter-dependently with the rest of the world, and may not disregard the world of which they are part. God is also eternally related to the world and penetrates both heaven and earth. On this basis, human beings are a part of *Han'uhnim*, who is the eternal life.²⁶ In Ryu's words:

²⁴ In Chinese characters, this letter literally means human being.

²⁵ *Tasōk-ōrok*, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

To place God on our head is the reason of our birth, and the content of triumph. In order to illuminate the light and power of God, to let God be brighter and more powerful, to uphold God over our head, and to put God on our head, we are born, and this leads us to triumph over the world.²⁷

Kūt thus symbolises the *raison d'être* of human beings. In this regard, Ryu says that the “unities of eternal heaven, boundless earth, and mysterious life become one; this is *kūt*. And *kūt* is a flame of the cosmos.”²⁸ Consequently, human beings always exist in the spatial terms of heaven and earth and cannot help seeking God, just as plants always turn toward the sun. This is the deepest nature of human beings.²⁹

Ryu's second metaphor of the divine-human relationship is drawn from his experience of filial piety (*hyo*, 孝), which binds father and son in an indissoluble relationship. Of this he wrote:

Han'uhnim, the Absolute, is the logos of creation of a myriad things, and opens the relative world by giving birth to a son. When my father gives birth to me, I am definitely able to recognise my father. We are the ones who should acknowledge the Absolute as father. The father cannot ignore the son. We who are sons call him father. There is no reason to be in a hurry. The relationship between father and son cannot be divided or separated. There seems to be a discrimination but never a dissolution.³⁰

There is the zenith of everything, and that is *Han'uhnim*: father. I am a seed which falls down to the ground, and I am the son myself.³¹

According to this metaphor, Ryu understands God in terms of the father who causes a son to be born. All that the eternal father brings into being exists in an intimacy of relationship with him that can be likened to that of a son.³² This applies to all human beings, because God relates to all humans as their father. Human beings are therefore

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Tasök-ōrok*, 47.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

³¹ *Tasök-ilji*. Vol. 1, 415.

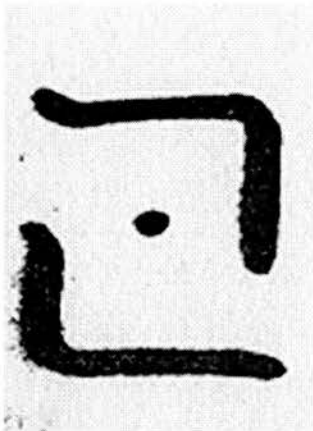
³² Kim Hūngho, *Tasök Myōngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasök), Vol. 1 (Seoul: Sōngch'ōnmunhwajaedan, 1998), 416. Hereafter, it is referred to as *Tasök Myōngsangrok*.

the sons of God. The supreme task of human beings is to live in a manner that pleases the father by pursuing the truth, practising righteousness, and being charitable to others. In this manner human beings are able to live in relationship with God through which they experience *Han'uhnim* to be:

Han'uhnim is fair and charitable, and His love is boundlessly great and immensely sincere. I, his son, serve my father with my whole heart, pursue the truth at all times, thinking with unlimited seriousness, and always seeking to do righteous and noble things. So the flame of agony is extinguished. I work hard to think of *Han'uhnim*'s sayings and to rectify the myriad things correctly.³³

The third metaphor that Ryu used in terms of his understanding of God is one that he referred to as *Kaon-tchiggi* (가온찍기). His own experience of *Kkaedalŭm* was something that touched the very centre of his being, transforming everything else in his life from this central point. To express this he took the first two characters of the Korean alphabet – *kiyŏk* (ㄱ) and *niŭn* (ㄴ). Placed together, as in Figure 3, with a dot in the middle, they form the following ideogram:

< Figure 3 >



Ryu interpreted *kiyŏk* and *niŭn* as symbols of heaven and earth respectively,³⁴ the cognition of God being achieved through the inter-penetration of the two. The

³³ Kim Hŭngho, *Tasŏk Myŏngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasŏk), Vol. 1, 414.

³⁴ Kim Hŭngho, *Chesori*, 321.

significance of ‘placing the dot in the middle’ (*Kaon-tchiggi*), he explains as follows:

Just like hitting a flying bird with an arrow, hitting righteous, holy, wise and eternal me right in the centre by awareness of my unlimited value is *Kaon-tchiggi* (가온찍기). This *Kaon-tchiggi* enables me to acknowledge the truth of myself... *kiyōk* exists to heighten *niün*, and *niün* exists to heighten *kiyōk*. The place a dot in the middle of these two. If *kiyōk* and the dot (·) are compounded, they produce the symbol *ka*(가),³⁵ meaning ‘to continue forever’. If the dot (·) and *niün* are compounded, they form the symbol *on* (온). Keep on going and going forever, keep on coming and coming eternally. The middle point of our ‘eternal going and coming’ is *Kaon-tchiggi* (가온찍기). This is the momentum of acknowledging the truth in order to meet eternity through *Kkaedalūm*. *Kaon-tchiggi*, which is to think and think again, to miss and miss heaven, and to practise and practise righteous things, is the core of human life.³⁶

According to this explanation, *Kaon-tchiggi* symbolises the dynamic activity of awakening. Human beings are like arrows, released from a bowstring by God, and the target of the arrow is perfect understanding of God. *Kaon-tchiggi* clearly symbolises the heart of human life, which is the true understanding of *Han’uhnim*.

In light of these three metaphors, it is possible to follow Ryu’s understanding of the full significance of the medial element *’uh* in the term *Han’uhnim*. *’Uh* has a perpendicular form of two circles, each associated with a horizontal stroke. In a similar way the two elements of *kūt* are positioned above and below a horizontal stroke, as *kiyōk* and *niün* are related to each other by the central dot. Each of these symbolises the relationship between God, who is above, and humankind, who is below, the two being distinguished in form but united in *Kkaedalūm*. The moral expression of this relationship is found in the filial piety that unites father and son, the latter honouring the former through righteous thought and action that mirrors the

³⁵ This letter means ‘go’ in English.

³⁶ *Tasōk-ōrok*, 31.

father's generation of the son. Moreover, the symbol 'uh suggests the reflection of one part of the construct in its inverse partner, each inter-penetrating the other so as to dissolve the distinction between upper and lower, between heaven and earth, between God and humankind. The same can be said of *kūt* and *kaon-tchiggi*, each symbolising the dynamic inter-action of the eternal and the temporal, as filial piety itself transcends the distinction between father and son.

2. Existence and Non-Existence as the Nature of *Han'uhnim*

In light of this understanding of how Ryu approached the task of theology, we can now inquire into his understanding of *Han'uhnim* in terms of the cognition that derives from experience. Ryu begins by asserting that there is no God. When asked about the existence of God, he replied that he does not know God.³⁷ By this he meant: "If we know where God is, that God is not God any more. The existence about whom we know the how, the when, and the where of his existence, and whom we call by a particular name, is not God."³⁸ Yet at the same time Ryu was in no doubt about the reality of *Han'uhnim*. Thus, he appears to be in the self-contradictory position of asserting that *Han'uhnim* exists but does not exist.

This apparent contradiction reflects the challenge that confronted Ryu in his efforts to construct a local theology. On the one hand, Buddhism starts from the premise that there is no absolute existence, while on the other Christianity affirms the existence of God. Between these apparently polar positions, Confucianism broadly affirms the existence of God, identified with Heaven, but includes traditions of thought from the writings of Hsun-tzu onwards that tend toward scepticism regarding the real existence of God as distinct from the mythological concepts of God's existence. As Ryu sought to reconcile different terms for God – *Hananim* and *Hanūnim* – so his theology attempted to embrace the reality of both the existence and the non-existence of God.

³⁷ *Tasök-örok*, 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

It is clear from his diaries that Ryu started from the premise of non-existence. Here he depended heavily on the Buddhist notion of *Mu* (無), of 'nothingness'. As elaborated by Nagarjuna (A.D.150-250?) and the *Madhyamika* ('middle') school of Buddhism, this proposed a way between the *Sarvastivada* (Doctrine That All Is Real) monks who maintained the reality of existence and the *vijñānavaita* who held that consciousness (*vijñāna*) alone is real. Nagarjuna argued that *nirvana* or nothingness is the transcending reality that inheres in the empirical world of the senses, and concluded that the latter have no real existence in themselves but are realised in the non-existence of *nirvana*. There is therefore no eternal existence behind the changing forms of existents. There is no soul, no thing, no concept that is independent of *nirvana*.³⁹ It is through meditation that the *Madhyamika* Buddhist seeks to overcome the false construction of existence and attain the true nothingness of *nirvana*.⁴⁰

Drawing on these ideas, Ryu denied two extremes in terms of his understanding of *Han'uhnim*: ultimate negation, and substantive affirmation. *Hanu'uhnim* is neither non-existent nor substantively existent. As the Japanese thinker Masao Abe has pointed out, a double negative is the most convincing way of expressing a positive. Ryu's use of the double negative language of *Mu*, nothingness, is his way of speaking most positively about God. Ryu took another insight from Nagarjuna: that true existence is possible only in relationship to nothingness (*sunyata*), which means that the *bodhisattva*, or buddha-to-be, perceives the non-existence of all things and hence becomes detached from them. Non-attachment is therefore the ethical corollary of non-existence. This entails non-attachment even to perfection. Thus the one who achieves *nirvana* is detached from an absolutist understanding of perfection and knows that truth exists only in the relational character of the moment.⁴¹

³⁹ For a fuller discussion of Nagarjuna's thought, see K. Venkata Ramanan (ed.), *Nagarjuna's Philosophy as Presented in the Maha-Prajñāparamita-Sastra* (1966, reprinted 1987); Richard H. Robinson, *Early Madhyamika in India and China* (1967, reprinted 1978); and T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamika System* (1955, reissued 1980).

⁴⁰ See F. Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 146.

⁴¹ Masao Abe, "Substance, Process, and Emptiness," *Japanese Religions* (September 1980), 31.

It is against this background that Ryu writes about *Mu* as follows:

Our life becomes immeasurably fuller when it reaches the state of *Mu*. So to speak, it reaches eternal life. *Mu* is the beginning and the foundation of life, the basis of myriad things, and *Han'uhnim*.⁴²

Here again we find echoes of Ryu's fascination with the thought of Lao-tzu. We have already quoted the passage from the *Tao Te Ching* which contrasts "that which is without name" yet is "of heaven and earth the beginning", with "that which is nameable" and which is "of the myriad things the mother."⁴³ Ryu understood this to mean that non-existence is the beginning of the universe, while existence is the mother of myriad things. Existence is manifested in the diversity of sentient phenomena, but in themselves these only serve to mask the reality of non-existence and need to be sublimated by *Mu*. The following poem by Ryu expresses this:

Non-existence indicates that which is immeasurably huge and complete; Existence means fragmentary pieces; It is natural for there to be a large number if there are many fragmentary pieces from place to place; But *Mugŭk* (무극, 無極, the ultimateless) and *T'aegŭk* (태극, 太極, the Supreme Ultimate) are the one and the uppermost.⁴⁴

For Ryu, *Han'uhnim* is *Mu* is the absolute sense. The myriad things in the world cannot be absolute. Therefore, nothing existing in the universe can be *Han'uhnim*; for only non-existence can be *Han'uhnim*. The term *Mugŭk* (the ultimateless), in the above poem, originated with Lao-tzu and appeared in the twenty-eighth chapter of *Tao-te Ching*: it denotes the Absolute seen in the perspective of non-existence. On the other hand, the term *T'aegŭk* (the Supreme Ultimate) appeared in the first part of *Kyesajŏn* (계사전, 繫辭傳 [Xici Zuan], Commentary on the Appended Phrases in Book of Changes), where it denotes the Absolute seen from the side of existence.⁴⁵

⁴² *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 285.

⁴³ See Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, 141.

⁴⁴ *Tasŏk-ilji* I, 637. In original text: 無者莫大全之謂, 有者衆小分之謂, 此有彼有多數爻, 無極太極一元位.

⁴⁵ These two will be discussed in connection with Ryu's thought on *Hana* (Oneness) in Chapter 6.

Ryu's emphasis on non-existence, or *Mu*, shows his determination to deny that God can be identified with any concept of being. In the sense of *T'aegŭk* God may be said to exist and to manifest Godself in ways that humans can sense, perceive, and express in terms of names and doctrines. Yet Ryu at the same time insists that, from the perspective of *Mugŭk*, even though God is called the highest, the primary cause, and the perfect substance, these and all such names limit the real character of God.⁴⁶ It is for this reason that in his diaries Ryu characteristically defines *Han'uhnim* as 'non-existent existence' (없이 계신), or the amplitude of nothingness, to which all that really exists relates. *Han'uhnim* is a concept beyond the demarcation of existence and non-existence. Thus Ryu writes:

Han'uhnim exists everywhere. *Han'uhnim* lives eternally. *Han'uhnim* exists from beginning to end, forever, and remains unchanged. *Han'uhnim* eternally turns around, but remains. Truly *Han'uhnim* is the basis of heaven and earth. We dare not limit Him. If confined by limits, can He be called the Way? If compelled to be named, is He the being who is so great and moves boundlessly? Does He exist far away, or near by? (Translation by Kim Hŭngho)⁴⁷

This understanding of the perceived existence of God being in reality God's non-existence is achieved through enlightenment or awakening. This comes about not through rational cognition, but through a moment of illumination, such as Ryu compared to being struck by a flying arrow that penetrates the heart and makes one aware of the reality of nothingness. It was from such experience that Ryu wrote of *Han'uhnim* in the following terms:

Anything which has a great value cannot be owned. A big jewel is put in a bank. The bigger, the farther away. *Han'uhnim* seems to be a great distance away because *Han'uhnim* is so great. But the reality of *Han'uhnim* is eventually myself. My real self. I know that *Han'uhnim* exists because I exist.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Regarding this, Tillich says that the sentence, 'God exists' limits God to finiteness, and is no different from denying God, and is a blasphemy against the absoluteness of God at the same time. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951-63), 205, 237.

⁴⁷ *Tasŏk Myŏngsangrok* 1, 494.

⁴⁸ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 269.

As the ground and the power of being, *Han'uhnim* is present to all beings, and all beings are dependent on *Han'uhnim*. *Han'uhnim* as *Mu* exists completely beyond all things and at the same time internalises himself in all things. Nonetheless, *Han'uhnim* is closely related with human beings and can be experienced personally.⁴⁹ In other words, human beings experience *Han'uhnim* personally and non-personally through the being and non-being of *Han'uhnim*. In terms of Ryu's experience, *Han'uhnim* is known both as the ultimate reality which is non-existence, and as a personal being who has the characteristics of human beings.

Ryu's understanding of *Han'uhnim* is based on a perfect harmony between existence and non-existence. Within Ryu's concept of *Han'uhnim*, the ultimate reality can be understood as non-existence in Buddhist terms, and as God as a personal being in Christian terms, without conflict or discomfort.

3. Harmony of *Hana* (Oneness)

Ryu's effort to harmonise the polarities of existence and non-existence in his concept of thinking about *Han'uhnim* brings us back to the first element of the term: *Han* or *Hana*, meaning 'one'. Of this he writes:

Nothing exists but the truth. Since the truth is the one, that is to be *Hana*. We have to enter the world of *Hana*. We should go looking for that place where the upper part of our minds belongs. Where the upper part of our head abides is where *Han'uhnim* exists. What I am insisting is that you acknowledge *Hana* and enter the world of *Hana*.⁵⁰

Ryu applies the concept of *Hana* to the harmonisation of apparent polarities: that is say, to phenomena that in sensory terms appear to be opposites, but which are in reality united in *Hana*. The first dimension in which Ryu applies this thinking is to the relationship between *Han'uhnim* and humankind. He interprets *Hana* as the fundamental characteristic of human existence. It is conferred upon humanity by God,

⁴⁹ As shown in the process of Ryu's understanding God, God who is experienced as father to human beings cannot help being personal. God as father is an existence that should be respected through filial piety. See *Tasök-ilji*, 1, 369.

⁵⁰ *Tasök-ilji*, 1, 6.

and its truth is perceived by human beings through the moment of enlightenment that comes like a flying arrow in terms of *Kaon-tchiggi*. As discussed previously, enlightenment unites the subject and object, and since *Han'uhnim* and human beings are therefore united in enlightenment, Ryu emphasises that the reality of the Absolute exists within the enlightened individual. It is this that makes it possible for human beings to speak of God at all:

Since the Absolute, *Hana*, exists in me, the being who gives me the task of human beings is, as it were, *Hana*. By receiving the task, I am able to become a son of His. So I can feel that I become a son of *Hana*. Therefore, I have to play the role of a son of *Hana*.⁵¹

It is therefore as a son speaking of his father that it is possible for the enlightened human being to speak of *Han'uhnim*. To do so is to express the reality of *Hana*:

It is inevitable for us to think that we start from *Hana* and return to *Hana* eventually. In addition, there is a forcible need for us to do so... What great theologians and philosophers have believed and urged is that we should seek, believe, and say *Hana*. What the sages or Buddha acknowledge and gain as the Way is, so to speak, *Hana*. The human being is an existence who cannot choose but seek *Hana*.⁵²

Thus *Hana*, the Absolute, is perceived as the father who gives birth to human beings. *Han'uhnim* as non-existence can be understood by enlightened human beings as *Hana*, the One with whom enlightenment unites them. As *Hana*, the non-existent *Han'uhnim* can embrace the diversity of names which are applied to God, accepting them as metaphors through which human beings seek to explore their understandings of God. This explains Ryu's own pragmatic attitude toward naming God, and on this basis, it is not hard to understand why he delights in using so many different terms for God in the development of his local theology.

The second dimension in which Ryu applies his *Hana* thought is to the nature of God

⁵¹ *Tasŏk-ilji*, 1, 241.

⁵² *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 167.

himself. Having discussed the reality of *Han'uhnim* in terms of Buddhist concepts of non-existence and existence, it was to Confucianism that he turned to harmonise the cosmic and spatial facets of God, God's eternity and God's presence in history. For this purpose he uses the concepts of *Mugŭk* and *T'aegŭk*, which have already been mentioned. The Confucian scholar of the Sung dynasty Chou Tun-yi (周濂溪, 1017-1073) expresses the relationship between these two concepts in terms of the *yin* and *yan* in his *T'aegŭk-tosŏl* (태극도설), *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained*:

The Ultimateless (*wu chi*)! And yet also the Supreme Ultimate (*t'ai chi*)! The Supreme Ultimate through movement (*tung*) produces the *yang*. This movement, having reached its limit, is followed by quiescence (*ching*), and by this quiescence it produces the *yin*. When quiescence has reached its limit, there is a return to movement. Thus movement and quiescence, in alternation, become each the source of the other. The distinction between the *yin* and *yang* is determined, and their Two Forms (*liang yi*) stand revealed.⁵³

Mugŭk and *T'aegŭk* each share the common symbol of *gŭk* which means 'limit' or 'boundary', and in philosophical terms expresses the notion of finitude.⁵⁴ Prefixed with the symbol *t'ae* (태, 太) meaning 'great', *T'aegŭk* conveys the meaning of a great boundary. However widely it extends, it continues to define a limit. Thus, *T'aegŭk* cannot but be restricted. On the other hand, *Mugŭk* prefixes *gŭk* with *mu* which, as we have already seen, denies the existence of anything. Thus, *Mugŭk* means infinitude. In order to show its meaning more clearly, Chou Tun-i uses the ideogramme '而 (◌, i)' in his explanation of the *Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate*.⁵⁵ This conveys the meaning that *T'aegŭk* as finitude can only exist on the premise of *Mugŭk* or infinity. Without *Mugŭk*, *T'aegŭk* has no reality.

Upon this metaphysical understanding, Ryu built his understanding of the way in which *Han'uhnim* unites the personal being of God as 'the Lord of Heaven' and the

⁵³ In original text: 無極而太極. 太極動而生陽. 動極而靜. 靜而生陰. 靜極復動. 一動一靜, 互爲其根. 分陰分陽, 陽儀立焉. Fung Yu-lan, trans. by Derek Bodde, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 435-437.

⁵⁴ Kim Youngoak, *Kichŏlhak Sanjo*, 49.

⁵⁵ See footnote 77.

cosmic reality of *Han'uhnim* as non-existence. The former is based in the ancient Confucian identification of God as *T'ien-ti* (天地) 'Heaven and Earth', while the latter corresponds to '*U-ju* (宇宙), denoting 'cosmos' in an unlimited sense.⁵⁶ Taken separately, the terms *T'ien* and *Ti* mean 'heaven' and 'earth', but from the time of the Chou dynasty they have been fused together to express the concept of the supreme deity who can be invoked in prayer for blessings and approvals. It therefore affirmed the personal character of the Lord of Heaven and carried clear ethical implications. On the other hand, the concept of '*U-ju* expresses the concept of 'non-space', the negative '*U* (宇, 宇) being prefixed to *ju* (宙, 宙) meaning 'time'. Thus, in antithetical relationship with each other, *T'ien-ti* expresses the concept of finite space and time, while '*U-ju* denotes infinity in both spatial and temporal terms. In the relationship of *yin* and *yan*, each depends on the other. Thus in terms of space and time *T'ien-ti* originates from '*U-ju*,⁵⁷ – while in reality '*U-ju* incorporates *T'ien-ti* into an infinity that transcends even the greatest horizons of *T'ien-ti*. *T'ien-ti* is by nature limited, whereas '*U-ju* has no limits. Therefore, *T'ien-ti* is a restricted phenomenon, derivative from '*U-ju*, whereas '*U-ju* is the unlimited Absolute. In this manner Ryu draws a corollary between *T'ien-ti* and *T'aegŭk* on the one hand, and between '*U-ju* and *Mugŭk* on the other.

In his use of these concepts, however, Ryu is acutely aware that they have more than a merely theoretical value. He emphasises that they express the dynamic reality of constant mutual interaction between the infinite and the finite, between *Han'uhnim* as both non-existent and existent. The dynamic between them gives vitality to his interpretation of *Hana*, the One that holds them in harmony.

In this light, the complementary relation between *T'ien-ti* / *T'aegŭk* and '*U-ju* / *Mugŭk* should be highlighted in Ryu's thought on *Hana*. On this basis, Ryu's concept of *Han'uhnim* can bring an unbreakable and complementary harmony

⁵⁶ Kim Youngoak, *Kichŏlhak Sanjo*, 69.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

between the existence and non-existence, and the being and non-being of God. Ryu concludes:

Nothingness is *Mugŭk*, and uniqueness is *T'aegŭk*. *T'aegŭk* and *Mugŭk* are *Hana* (one), and *Hana* is God. Thinking of *T'aegŭk* as existence, it is natural to think of *Mugŭk* as non-existence.⁵⁸

The truth, what is that? The truth is *Hana*. This *Hana* is absolutely not two. *Hana* is the Absolute. The concept of the Absolute cannot be explained simply with the concepts of existence and non-existence. The issues of existence and non-existence are not the problem. Rather it is existence and non-existence. We want to feel and seek this Absolute.⁵⁹

Ryu's *Hana* thought stems from Eastern cosmology, but in faithfulness to that cosmology, he does not offer *Hana* merely as a theoretical system of theology, but rather as a means of cultivating a proper 'world view' (*weltanschauung*) that would orientate his disciples in an approach to living that corresponds to the metaphysical realities that his concept of *Han'uhnim* represents. Thus Ryu's understanding of *Hana*, as set forth in his writings, emphasises the practical way in which human beings should put *Hana* into practice throughout their life.

D. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Ryu's understanding of God is based on an Eastern cosmology and metaphysics, particularly as these have evolved in the centuries-old intellectual traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism. His own thinking evolved through his open engagement as a local Christian theologian with these other religious systems of thought. This illustrates the pragmatic character of his theological endeavours: his willingness to draw perceptively from these other religions in order to build his own local theology in such a way as would enable Korean Christians to develop a creative way of living in relationship to the metaphysical and religiously

⁵⁸ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 240.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

plural realities of their own culture. In order to achieve this religious goal, Ryu did not hesitate to employ various expressions from other religions. On the basis of these, Ryu put his thought into religious practice. As seen in the previous chapter, Ryu did not abandon this life in order to mediate on eternity, but lived a normal life that, through his experience of *Kkaedalŭm*, was shot through with realisation of the Absolute, as an arrow might penetrate the heart. His theological universality is always located in an intense personal relationship with God, and it was through this personal experience that Ryu was able to hold together the non-existence and the existence, the infinity and finitude of God in his understanding of *Hana*, One-ness, that lies at the heart of his preferred word for God, *Han'uhnim*. Ryu's appreciation of the Confucian understanding of filial piety, and its implication for the reciprocal relationship between father and son, deepened his understanding both of the human-divine relationship itself, and of its ethical consequences in the emphasis on human responsibility and duty, based on family relationships and the transcendence of God.

Chapter Five, *Ōl* (얼) as Christ: Ryu Yŏngmo's Approach to Christology

A. Introduction

Christology means seeking a Christian theological answer to the question – ‘who is Jesus Christ?’ Answers to this question have been varied throughout the history of Christianity, and diversities of Christology are evident in the New Testament itself and in the patristic period of Christian theology.¹ Such diversity reflects the particularities of time and place from which different understandings of Jesus Christ emerged. With reference to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's conceptual distinction between ‘faith’ and ‘belief’, it can be said that faith in Jesus Christ is a constant feature of the Christian tradition, Christian response to God being expressed through a faith-relationship with Jesus Christ; but equally it must be recognised that Christian faith in Jesus Christ has never received uniform intellectual or creedal expression in terms of Christian belief.²

One of the central challenges facing local theology is to develop authentically indigenous ways of speaking about Jesus Christ. If belief, as the creedal expression of faith, is shaped by the influences of context, it is a fundamental premise of local theology that the expression of Christology will legitimately vary from context to context. Common to all these Christologies is a faith relationship with Jesus Christ. But this must be distinguished from a normative structure of Christology in terms of belief.

The diaries of Ryu Yŏngmo leave the reader in no doubt that his relationship with Jesus was central to his entire religious experience. It was this relationship that

¹ Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, trans. by John Bowden (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 33.

² The early church tried to describe the testimony of Jesus in various different ways in the New Testament. Christopher Tuckett, “Christology and the New Testament”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 33, 405-406.

defined his self-identity as a Christian. Yet in page after page of the diaries, we see him struggling with the challenge of expressing his life-defining faith in Jesus in ways that reflect the Korean cultural and religious traditions of which he was deeply convinced that Jesus was part, in spirit if not in terms of his own life history. This chapter therefore aims to investigate Ryu's understanding of Jesus Christ and to show how this relates to Ryu's understanding of God, which was analysed in the previous chapter.

The key term that Ryu uses in relation to Christ is *Öl* (얼), a genuinely Korean word that has no equivalent in Sino-Korean. The first task of this chapter must be to clarify the meaning of *Öl* in general Korean usage, and to analyse the particular nuances of meaning that Ryu gave it by adopting it as his characteristic way of speaking about Christ. Secondly, on the basis of his application of the concept of *Öl* to Christology, we will explore how Ryu comprehended Jesus Christ in a multi-religious situation through his writings. This will be an important factor in understanding Ryu's local context; in particular, Ryu's metaphoric explanations of the relationship between Jesus and Christ will be considered. Lastly, we shall attempt to draw out the significance of Ryu's understanding of Christ as *Öl* in terms of a local Korean Christology. It will be argued that the concrete features of a local Christology can be clearly revealed on the basis of Ryu's effort to illuminate the relationships between Jesus, Christ, and God the Father as *Öl*. In addition, we will consider the problems of incarnation and salvation linked to *Öl* Christology.

B. Understanding *Öl*

Öl is a word of pure Korean origin, with no equivalent in Sino-Korean. It denotes 'spirit' or 'soul' and refers to an invisible power that infuses life with vitality and continuity. Even though the term does not have a religious significance in Korean culture, Ryu saw that it had the potentiality to be filled with theological meaning and thus to convey his understanding of Christ in authentically Korean terms, beyond

merely translating Western Christological terms into Korean. The following paragraphs will attempt to clarify this potentiality by examining both the general meaning of *Öl* in Korean semantic usage, and the particular meaning that Ryu attributed to it.

1. Defining *Öl*

a. Definition and Examples of *Öl*

As already mentioned, *Öl* is an indigenously Korean term that has been used in a socio-cultural rather than a theological-philosophical context. It typically occurs in such phrases as ‘the *Öl* of Korea’ (한국의 얼) or ‘the patriotic *Öl*’ (애국적인 얼), expressing the non-material dimension of the socio-cultural identity of the nation. Even though *Öl* has a real existence, it cannot be identified through sensory perception because it has no definite shape, colour, or sound. Due to its abstract nature, it is difficult to define and easy to belittle in terms of significance. Nevertheless, whenever a great national crisis has occurred in Korean history, it is *Öl* to which the people have appealed as the ‘spirit’ that holds them together. In other words, *Öl* has played a very significant role in overcoming crises and bringing the nation and its people to success. Thus, although *Öl* is intangible and difficult to define in itself, its effects can be quite clearly evidenced in the sentiments of Korean society. This shows that *Öl* has a dynamic power that gives reason and meaning to human life. This was never more emphatically the case than during the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), when Korean social, cultural and political identity was being suppressed: *Öl*, by virtue of its being intangible, could not be extinguished by the occupiers, and proved to be the spirit which sustained the people and animated their determination to survive. These were the conditions in which Ryu’s young mind was formed, and it is not surprising therefore that it was to the concept of *Öl* that he turned in later years when trying to find an indigenously Korean way of expressing his faith in Jesus Christ.

2. *Öl* in Ryu’s Writing

The first thing to note is that Ryu used *Öl* as the equivalent of the word of ‘spirit’ (*pneuma*) in the New Testament. For example, in a verse for the Gospel of St John (6: 63) to which he gave great importance, he translated ‘spirit’ as *Öl*: “It is the *Öl* [Spirit] who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.”³ This immediately raises the question: how did Ryu understand the relationship between *Öl* as spirit, and the flesh? The following passage from his diary explains:

The world of beginning which leads to the end is that of the flesh. But the world of beginning which starts from the end is that of *Öl*. To be born and to die is of the flesh, to die and to live is *Öl*. *Öl* is the life that starts from the death of the self... There is no end in *Öl*. There is always and only the beginning.⁴

This makes it clear that Ryu understood *Öl* and flesh in relational terms. Flesh denotes physical appetite and desire. Ryu admits that both are essential for human life, but argues that they have no benefit in and of themselves, but only insofar as they are used for God’s purpose. He emphasises that “human beings eat meals in order to fulfil God’s Will. Otherwise there is no point in eating.” He continued: “Sexual desire is rooted in human energy, and this energy should be used for deep thought or reproduction. It should be used for other persons or God.”⁵

Thus, in Ryu’s theology *Öl* and the flesh exist in necessary relationship with each other. Flesh is essential to human life and human relationships, and Ryu does not shrink from accentuating its importance. Indeed, he wishes for three things in life, and one of them is health.⁶ He wishes to be healthy because, as he says, “it is necessary to have a healthy body in order to accomplish the responsibility of perfecting the whole human being. A healthy body enables us to live with a sound spirit. In order to accomplish our aim, we need to esteem our flesh.”⁷ For human life to be fulfilled, however, the flesh and all it represents must be penetrated by the spirit,

³ *Chesori*, 128. Ryu translates Spirit in this paragraph as *Öl*.

⁴ *Tasökök-örök*, 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*

for it is *Öl* that links the human person to real existence which, as non-existence, transcends material or corporeal phenomena.

This understanding of the spirit-flesh relationship returns us to issues discussed in the previous chapter which underline the importance of Confucianism and Buddhism as the background for Ryu's Christian theology. Therefore, a fuller understanding of Ryu's concept of *Öl* needs to take account of his interpretations of Confucianism and Buddhism. This chapter will argue that the former intensifies the religious meanings of *Öl*, while the latter highlights the close relationship between *Öl* and human beings.

In terms of Confucianism, Ryu draws a parallel between the concept of *Öl* and *Söng* (性, Nature). Nature is the central concept of the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Golden Mean* (*Chung Yung*). According to the teaching of *The Golden Mean*, all that exists in the world is produced and maintained by Nature, and the goal of human life is to live in harmony with nature. *Söng* means both Nature and Truth.⁸ Therefore Ryu interprets this concept of Nature in terms of God, in accordance with the theistic traditions of Confucianism, and proceeds to apply this understanding to his concept of *Öl*:

Söng (性, Nature), of itself, is God. *Söng* (性, Nature), as a given thing, is spirit. This given thing can be more or less, depending on the person. God does not give *Söng* (性, Nature) just once; He gives all the time.... things given by God are all called *Söng* (性, Nature) whether of the body or the mind. As a result, *Söng* (性, Nature) is Heaven's decree, which is the Son resembling God.⁹

It seems clear, therefore, that Ryu understands *Öl* as the very presence of God in nature and human life. The word '*Söng* (性, Nature)' is the compound of two Chinese characters, 心 meaning 'mind' and 生 meaning 'life'. Whereas this has led Neo-Confucian scholars to interpret *Söng* as the mental desire for life in the body,

⁸ Yi Kidong, *A Lecture on the Great Learning and the Mean of Doctrine* (대학 중용 강설) (Seoul: Sönggyunkwan University Press, 1990), 100.

⁹ Park Yönggho, *Tasöök Ryu Yöngmo üi Yugyosasang* (다석 류영모의 유교사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Confucian Thought), Vol. 1, 33.

Ryu disagrees and insists on the identification of *Sōng* (性) and real life itself.

Our breathing is life, but life which needs to breathe is not real life. Life which breathes with the spirit is real life – *Ch'ōn Myōng* (천명, 天命). If we live in real life, there is eternal life, for which it is unnecessary to breathe.¹⁰

With similar meaning he writes:

Spirit is precisely like our mental breathing. Spirit is the *Ŏl* of our mind. The Spirit of *Ŏl* is precisely the real me and eternal life. Some mistakenly believe that great power through the Spirit enables us to cure disease and not to die even though we drink poison. But great power through the Spirit does not mean such a thing.¹¹

Thus, the defining characteristic of Ryu's understanding of *Sōng* (性, Nature) is that it is identified with life as such. It is shared by all human beings and affirms that every human being is inspired by the direct reality of God in his or her life.¹²

While Ryu engages with Confucian ideas for his understanding of the essential meaning of *Ŏl*, it is to the Buddhist concept *Pulsōng* (佛性, Buddha-dhatu or Gotra) that he turns for his elaboration of how *Ŏl* operates in terms of reaching perfect awakening. This term also is formed through a compound of two ideas: *Pul*, which is the Korean way of referring to Buddha; and *Sōng* (性), which we have already discussed. Therefore, *Pulsōng* means the original nature of Buddha and expresses the concept that every human being has the potential of becoming a Buddha, one who has achieved enlightenment.

Ryu understands *Pulsōng* as follows:

Buddha [i.e. *Pulsōng*] is not an individual who is born or dies. *Pulsōng* is eternal life. Consequently if the body of Buddha is born and enters Nirvana, it

¹⁰ Park Yōngho, *Tasōk Ryu Yōngmo ūi Yugyosasang* (다석 류영모의 유교사상, Ryu Yōngmo's Confucian Thought), Vol. 1, 20.

¹¹ *Tasōk-ōrok*, 233. Ryu refers to Mark 16:12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 383.

is a temporary expedient of *Pulsŏng*. This is a simple way for the ordinary person to acknowledge *Pulsŏng*.¹³

It is clear that Ryu broadly identifies the concept of *Pulsŏng* in Buddhism with the *Sŏng* (性) of Confucianism. Both articulate the concept of truth which is universal in the sense of being omnipresent within Nature, and this is basic to the meaning that Ryu applies to *Ŏl*. It is from Buddhism, however, that Ryu derives his understanding of how this universal truth, the Buddha-teaching, is personified in the individual search for enlightenment.

Thus, Ryu's understanding of *Ŏl* through Buddhism can be summarised thus: firstly, *Ŏl* is the energy of Nature that penetrates and maintains the myriad phenomena of nature; secondly, it emphasises the imperative of the search for enlightenment as the way to achieve harmony with the reality of Nature; and thirdly, it contains the reality of eternal life within it.

As has already been noted, Ryu was not given to systematic explanations of his theology. We look in vain, therefore, for a systematic presentation of his concept of *Ŏl* and recognise that he preferred to suggest his meaning by way of analogies. Ryu's analogies of *Ŏl* are found in his analects. Typical of these is the analogy that likens *Ŏl* to the natural state of the human being when clothes are removed from the body:

The body of a human being is [like] cast-off clothing, and is nothing special. The body is nothing but clothing. Clothing is eventually removed. Even though many more clothes are put on top of what we are wearing, they are nothing but clothes which are soon taken off. Consequently, the master of human beings is [not the body but] *Ŏl*.¹⁴

Elsewhere Ryu identifies the 'master' of the human being with a person's face: in Korean, *Ŏlgul* (얼굴). Ryu draws attention to the fact that this is a compound of two

¹³ Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ŭi Pulgyosasang* (다석 류영모의 불교사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Buddhist Thought), 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

words: *Öl*, meaning ‘spirit’, and *Gul*, meaning ‘valley’. He says:

The valley which exposes *Öl* is *Ölgul*. The fact that everyone holds up their face seems to have the symbolic meaning that only the face is exposed. The fact that everyone tries to keep their faces comely, and holds them up, seems to show that the mind, which is more important than the body, is revealed in the face. The body is clothing, and *Öl* is the master. The face does not subsist under the body; on the contrary, the body subsists under the face. The face is the master and the body is a slave.¹⁵

For Ryu, therefore, the *Öl* is not limited to the body, but surpasses it and connects with the cosmos itself, the reality of which exists within a person’s own self. Thus he writes:

Looking into the face, its valley is so deep. The valley, so-called *Kol* (골), behind the face has so many deep gullies. Beyond the cerebellum and cerebrum, unlimited mysteries of the cosmos connect with the face. Keep thinking deeply on and on, the stars and sky of the cosmos do not present a problem. Beyond the stars and skies, there is a sea of thought and the seat of God. In the deep and secluded place, there is the master of the face, my real self – *Öl*.¹⁶

The face, therefore, radiates the reality of *Öl* within a person’s being. It is the symbol of the presence of the spirit that links the human person with eternal life. Ryu compares it to a ‘rope’ (줄), “the rope of eternal life, which a human cannot help following, is placed before a human’s fate. This rope of *Öl* exists forever, and human beings cannot abandon it or leave it.”¹⁷ It is possible, however, for this rope to be weakened as its fibres become attenuated under severe pressure, and finally break. Ryu draws this out in his reflection on Adam and Cain:

All of a sudden, *Öl* is lost, when we pick and eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Where is the face of Adam? With shame, he hides under the shadow of fig trees, and tears caused by losing *Öl* well up in Eve’s breasts. Cain who drinks [literally ‘sucks’ (먹다)] those tears kills his brother, tears coming to his eyes, bloody tears that fall on Abel’s eyes. What a disaster!

¹⁵ *Tasök-örök*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Depravation! Depravation! Depravation from face to body, alienation from *Öl* to clothes. Corruption by losing *Öl* and becoming a slave to the substance, losing the spirit and becoming a slave to flesh. Alas, what a disaster!¹⁸

This quotation illustrates the passionate style that marks Ryu's writing. It states quite clearly that the consequence of Adam's sin and of Cain's fratricide is 'depravation', but is ambiguous about the effect of this depravation on their *Öl*. On one hand he suggests that the *Öl* is damaged by sin to the point of being lost: or to return to the analogy of the rope, that it is broken. On the other, he appears to insist that the *Öl* can never be lost or broken, because it is the universal and omnipresent spirit of God. Ryu does not resolve this ambiguity. The present researcher, however, would conclude that Ryu is to be understood as affirming the constancy of *Öl* in a metaphysical sense, while in a moral sense he warns that the effect of *Öl* can be seriously diminished by human sin.

On another occasion, Ryu elaborated the meaning of *Öl* by drawing an analogy with a tree and its seed:

The *Öl* of God is a tree. Where does the seed come from? From a tree. The tree is the foundation (*Atman*) of the seed.¹⁹

As in this manner of thinking, the tree is the source of the seed, so God is the source of *Öl* as the spirit that penetrates everything in Nature, linking it to God as the source of its existence and reality. *Öl* is the spirit that gives life to Nature itself. Since it is present within every part of Nature, Ryu confidently affirmed that it exists in every human being. He therefore expressed an essentially optimistic view of human nature. However corrupt it may seem, it must always be affirmed as a seed of God. With characteristic self-deprecation, he wrote:

I am nothing but a piece of old moldy bread. Yet there is one strange thing which is derived from *Hana* (i.e. God) – the principle, that this is the seed of

¹⁸ *Tasök-örök*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

By cultivating the seed that is sown within a person's being, it is possible to advance towards the Absolute Being, and this is the final goal of faith.²¹ On the basis of his understanding, Jesus also succeeds in sprouting the seed fully, so that *Öl* as the seed is a quite significant and unique concept for Ryu.²² As a result, *Öl* as the seed of God enables human beings to achieve self-cultivation, and then leads us to reach the goal of faith.

We have argued in previous chapters that Ryu was pragmatic in his approach to theology in two respects. Firstly, he was willing to draw pragmatically from different religious traditions in the development of his local Christian theology. Secondly, his interest was not in building a theoretical system, but in offering a practical way of living through which it would be possible for a person to evolve a means of self-cultivation. If this chapter has concentrated so far on the former aspect, this must now be balanced by attention to the practical significance of *Öl* in terms of life experience.

In this regard Ryu speaks of *Öl* as follows:

When my Spirit has communicated with God, my eyes flash with vitality and my words gain strength. God is the sea, and I am a fountain. The life of God is larger than my thought. God's words through human beings are the *Söng* (성, 誠, the Truth)²³. The truth is the Spirit of God. Only the truth makes persons upright. When the *Söng* (性, Nature) which God gives to me, the so-called *Öl* which is the Will of God's Son or that of *Pulsöng* in Buddhism, is realised, the will of truth can be proclaimed. The purpose of human life is to pursue the will of truth, which is God. This means to pursue *Öl* which exists in me.²⁴

²⁰ *Tasökö-örök*, 148.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

²² *Ibid.*, 341.

²³ The term *Söng* (성, 誠) in *the Doctrine of the Mean* is pronounced the same as the word *Söng* (性, Nature). James Legge translates this as 'Sincerity', but this researcher translates it as 'the Truth'.

²⁴ Park Yönggho, *Tasökö Ryu Yöngmo üi Yugyosasang* (다석 류영모의 유교사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Confucian Thought), Vol. 1, 214.

This emphasis on the practical dimension of *Öl* also bears close affinity with Confucian teaching. Truth is less a concept than a practice:

What is called *Söng* (성, 誠, the Truth) means God. It is clearly expressed in Confucianism that the truth is Heaven and that to put it into practice is what we should do... To keep thinking *Söng* (성, 誠, the Truth) is the living way of human beings. We should long for the truth. The truth is the way of Heaven, and human beings follow the way of Heaven directly. But we do not realise it and frequently we are interrupted by obstacles on the way of Heaven.²⁵

This passage from Ryu's diary shares an affinity with *The Doctrine of the Golden Mean* where, in the twenty-second chapter, it is stated:

It is only he who is possessed of the most complete sincerity [the Truth] that can exist under heaven, who can fully develop his nature. Able to develop his own nature fully, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to develop the nature of other men fully, he can develop the natures of animals and things fully. Able to develop the natures of creatures and things fully, he can assist the transforming and nourishing of the powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing of the powers of Heaven and Earth, he may form a ternion with Heaven and Earth.²⁶

In his Christian theology Ryu interprets this passage in terms of the spirit, the Holy Spirit and Christ. He uses these terms interchangeably, though he also appears to imply distinctions between them. At the risk of distorting his preferred ambiguities by offering a systematic interpretation, the present writer would offer the following explanation. While *Öl* as God's spirit is present in the myriad things of creation and latent within every human being, it is fulfilled as the Holy Spirit when individuals succeed in conforming their lives to its spiritual and ethical imperatives through self-cultivation. Ryu actually states that "the Holy Spirit is the fulfilment of *Öl*."²⁷ Here it can be inferred that his understanding of the fulfilment of *Öl* as the Holy Spirit

²⁵ Park Yönggho, *Tasökh Ryu Yöngmo üi Yugyosasang* (다석 류영모의 유교사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Confucian Thought), Vol. 1, 93.

²⁶ James Legge, *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of Mean* (New York: Dover Publication, 1971), 415-416.

²⁷ *Tasökh-örok*, 233.

converges with the reality of Christ, the Holy Spirit in Ryu's thinking being the same as Christ. Reverting to the concept of *Sōng*, Ryu appears to be suggesting that *Sōng* as Nature (性) is *Ŏl* in the general sense of spirit, whereas *Sōng* as Truth (誠) is the Holy Spirit which he identifies ultimately with Christ.

The Chinese character 誠 (*Sōng*, 성, the Truth) means that the word is realised. In Christianity the word is realised and the prophecy is fulfilled by Christ, whereas in Confucianism the person who fulfils the word becomes a sage.²⁸

Christ, in Ryu's thinking, is therefore more than a Confucian sage. Christ is the fulfilment of the universal *Ŏl* that inheres in Nature, and is the Truth to which Nature leads. *Ŏl* and Christ exist in dynamic continuity with each other, just as Nature and Truth are comprised in the single idea of *Sōng*. Christ, however, is the systematising principle in the *Ŏl* - God relationship, and equally is the realisation of human endeavours to live in accordance with *Ŏl*.

In review of the discussion so far, our analysis of Ryu's interaction with Confucian and Buddhist ideas in his elaboration of the Korean concept of *Ŏl* is illustrative of his theological method. For this central idea in his theology, he began by adopting a term that is of genuinely Korean origin, in the sense that it has neither a Chinese precedent, nor Sino-Korean equivalent. The Korean term, however, had no particularly religious meaning, but was well understood in terms of a socio-cultural concept of 'spirit' that had the power to sustain the Korean people in times of crisis. In choosing this term as the 'dynamic equivalent' of the New Testament *pneuma*, he filled it with theological meaning. For his hermeneutic of the biblical concept of 'spirit' and 'Holy Spirit', however, he combined his reading of the Bible with an exploration of the metaphysical and ethical understandings of Nature in Confucianism and Buddhism, the major metaphysical traditions in Korean religious pluralism. It is in the interaction of these three sources that his local understanding of Christology takes shape.

²⁸ *Tasōk-ōrok*, 23.

C. The Understanding of Jesus in Ryu's Writing

Throughout his writing Ryu lays a great emphasis on *Öl* as Christ, and to this we must return in due course. To understand this in the context of Jesus' life, however, it is first necessary to examine Ryu's understanding of Jesus. As has already been stated, the question "who is Jesus?" lies at the heart of all Christologies. The question which the remainder of this chapter seeks to answer is how Ryu's answered this question in relation to his understanding of *Öl* as the omnipresent spirit of God.

Ryu's understanding of Jesus can in one sense be expressed quite simply: Jesus was the human being in whose life the *Öl* of God was fully realised, making him therefore a man whom others can follow in their own search for self-cultivation.

Let us begin with Jesus' humanity. By insisting on the fact that Jesus was a human being, Ryu emphasised that Jesus was a man like all others. His humanity was real and subject to the same limitations and possibilities as any other person's humanity. Like all human beings, Jesus' physical being – his flesh – was subject to the frailties of the human condition. Ryu expressed these as three forms of defilement: craving, anger, and delusion, reflecting Buddhist anthropology that diagnoses the human condition in terms of *dukkha* (suffering), caused by *tanha* (craving), resulting in *anicca* (decay).²⁹ As a consequence, Jesus as a human being has exactly the same body as other human beings. Like them his body is prone to sin: and although Ryu did not adhere to the Western Christian doctrine of original sin, he made no attempt to exclude Jesus from the influence of sin that inflicts the lives of all human beings. Thus he could write:

In terms of flesh, the body of Jesus has the same flesh as my body, which is nothing but a cast-off that should die.³⁰

²⁹ Ryu borrowed these three forms of defilement from the Buddhist idea of the impermanence (*anicca*) of an earthly life that is lived in suffering/evil (*dukkha*). Park Yŏngho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saengae wa Sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo's Life and Thought), Vol. 1, 321.

³⁰ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 308.

However, Ryu also maintained that Jesus was able to overcome the effects of sin in his own life. But to make this point, he did not use the orthodox Christian doctrine that Jesus' human nature, though real, was united with a divine nature that exempted him from original sin. As he rejected the concept of original sin, he also rejected the belief that Jesus' humanity was saved from the corrupting influence of sin by his divinity. In fact, he did not accept the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, at least in the metaphysical sense of Jesus being 'begotten' of God. Ryu quite emphatically rejected such thinking as being tantamount to idolatry. The fleshy nature of a human being cannot, must not, be divinised. Thus, he warned:

Do not make an idol of a person. The one to whom we can bow down is God, who is the truth. Religion does not mean to worship a person. If we do not acknowledge God correctly, we make an idol of a person. This is the cause of idolatry. This is the consequence of putting Jesus in place of God.³¹

Flesh is, according to Ryu's way of thinking, the outer clothing of humanity which will eventually be cast off. As long as it serves to clothe the body, it can be purified by the inner *Öl* that gives it life and therefore links it with the real, non-existent existence of *Han'uhnim*. This is the significance of Jesus' life: not that he was born divine and therefore of a different humanity than mortal human beings; not that he was born sinless and therefore exempt from the moral struggles of ordinary men and women; but that, sharing the same corruptible body as the rest of humankind, he succeeded in transforming his instinctual self into a spiritual self, and by this means fulfilled the potentialities of the *Öl* that gave him life, as it gives life to all humankind. For this reason he is the example for others to follow.³²

The means by which Jesus achieved this fulfilment, and by which others may follow his example, was, according to Ryu, the practice of filial piety, known in Korean as *Puja yuch'in* (부자유친, 父子有親).³³ Ryu interpreted the way of *Puja yuch'in* in

³¹ *Tasök-örok*, 278.

³² When Ryu considers the Chinese character 我 (I), it is always used in front of others. *Ibid.*, 153.

³³ This means that there should be affection between father and son. This will be discussed fully in the section on 'Jesus as the Son of God'.

terms of self-emptiness and altruism, and linked it ultimately with Jesus' death on the cross in fulfilment of God's will.³⁴

Filial piety is the highest of the Confucian virtues and lies at the heart of the 'Five Relationships' – ruler-subject, father-son, husband-wife, elder-younger brother, and friend-friend – of the Confucian social system.³⁵ It is an essential element of the Mandate of Heaven. While giving it the highest value in his own concept of ethics, Ryu criticised the tendency in Confucianism to interpret filial piety only in terms of natural relationships and social order. This, he argued, was to lose its spiritual significance. His view was that, in terms of the original Confucian understanding, filial piety transcended physical relationships and was the way in which human beings felt themselves to be united with Heaven, reflecting in earthly terms the metaphysical state of harmony between Heaven, Earth and humankind. To this critique, Ryu brought his interpretation of the New Testament witness to Jesus' relationship with God, and argued that this should be understood contextually as his fulfilling the spiritual as well as the physical demands of filial piety to their perfection. Therefore, if religion means following the way of Heaven, the quality of Jesus' filial piety distinguished him as the sage who succeeds in representing and practising filial piety better than any other person. Thus, Ryu argued that the perfect form of *Puja yuch'in* is found in the example of Jesus, and in this sense in true Christianity. This was the manner in which he interpreted the biblical language of 'Father' and 'Son'. In accordance with his concept of original Confucianism, Ryu took 'Father' to denote Heaven in the personal terms of *Hanu'uhnim* as Father, the source of *Öl*. In metaphorical expression the Heavenly Father begot His Son, not physically but in terms of *Öl*, and it was by living in harmony with *Öl* that the Son achieved perfect filial concord with his Father. An example of this kind of interpretation is found in the following quotation from Ryu's diary:

The Absolute God opens a relative world by giving birth to a son, the logos of

³⁴ *Tasök-örök*, 166.

³⁵ See Chapter 2, 55.

all creatures (the logos should be understood as *Ŏl*). The father gives birth to me as a son. That is why I certainly acknowledge my father. In this light, we have to acknowledge the father who is the Absolute. A father cannot forget a son. We call him father. There is no hurry. The relation between father and son cannot be sundered and divided. There seems to be a difference, but there is no separation.³⁶

Reflecting Jesus' perfect filial piety toward the divine Father, Ryu described him as *kunja* (군자, 君子) – the term for a person of virtue in Confucian thought. This denotes the quality of the sage (*Söngin*, 성인, 聖人), who Confucian scholars define as “the one who possesses a Way which penetrates everywhere...[and] is in union with Heaven and Earth in his virtue.”³⁷ There was no doubt in Ryu's mind that Jesus is the perfect sage, and that his powers of sagehood arose from his realisation of the potentialities of *Ŏl* that infused his humanity. The real Jesus, therefore, was the master of *Ŏl*, and Ryu willingly refers to him in this sense as the Son of Heaven, and occasionally as God's ‘only begotten son’. Neither of these terms implies that Jesus himself had a divine nature or that he participated in the divinity of God. Ryu used the terms metaphorically, though the metaphor was grounded in the actual spiritual experience of *Puja yuch'in*:

I call Him [Jesus] *kunja*. *Kunja* is a son of a king or a son of Heaven. He [Jesus] means one who longs for Heaven. The one who longs for Heaven and attains Heaven is Him.³⁸

By this process of self-transcendence Jesus, the *kunja*, overcame the weakness of his fleshy body and became an *Ŏl* – inspired sage in the highest possible degree. This provided Ryu with a hermeneutical approach to the great Christological passages of the New Testament, especially in the Gospel of John. Typical in this respect is Ryu's interpretation of John 14:16, of which he wrote:

The way, the truth, and the life that Jesus sees are as follows: the way means to come from Heaven to earth and go back to Heaven, the truth means to walk

³⁶ *Tasök-örok*, 105.

³⁷ Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study*, 80.

³⁸ *Tasök-örok*, 126.

this way, and the life means that father and son become one through a great enlightenment. The son of a person – the Son of Man in terms of the Bible – comes from Heaven and goes back to Heaven. To walk this way unswervingly is the truth. Consequently, to meet God is the life. In terms of a railway, the rails are the way, trains are the truth, and arrival is the life. In this sense, there is no difficulty in our life at all.³⁹

In view of the importance that Ryu attached to the life of Jesus as setting out the way of awakening and of self-cultivation, the reader of his diaries will be struck by the relatively few references that he made either to the teaching of Jesus or to events in his life. It might be argued that this points to a certain Gnostic tendency in Ryu's Christology, in the sense that he laid more importance on Jesus' knowing the truth through the *Ŏl* than on the practical demonstration of this knowledge in his life and teaching. This judgement must, however, be balanced by the fact that the single event of Jesus' life to which Ryu repeatedly referred was his Passion. This stands out more clearly in importance when set against the relative absence of attention to other aspects of his life. It is through Jesus' passion and death, which Ryu interpreted as self-sacrifice, that he (Jesus) accomplished his mission as 'Son of Heaven', fulfilling in his own life the will of his heavenly Father.

Ryu's reflection on the meaning of Jesus' passion is expressed in the following passage:

Since a flower is red as *p'i* (피, blood), we say flowers bloom (피다, *p'i-da*)⁴⁰ The flower is the blood (*p'i*) of nature, and the blood of human beings is the flowering blood of nature. The flower is blood, and blood is the flower. The blood that Jesus shed on the cross is as lovely as a flower. In a word, it is the blood of a righteous person. Even a sinful world can be cleansed through the flowering blood of a righteous person. The only thing that makes the world righteous is the blood of a righteous person. When righteous blood is shed in the world, the glory of God is revealed. This is a symbol of maturity. Maturity means to become a son of God. A son of God is myself as *Ŏl* who overcomes the death of the flesh. To acknowledge the truth is the same as to overcome death. To overcome death means to get over immaturity. A person who pursues

³⁹ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 167.

⁴⁰ *P'i-da* (bloom) has the same root as *p'i* (blood) in Korean.

only knowledge is a minor. The truth and maturity have the same meaning, which is manifest in the overcoming of death.⁴¹

In typically poetic manner, Ryu draws out the meaning of Jesus' passion, building on the similarity between the Korean words for blood (*p'i*) and the blooming of a flower (*p'i-da*). Through the agony of Jesus' bloody death, Ryu sees the redness of a flower in bloom. The cruelty of Jesus' suffering on the cross evokes an image of the beauty of nature. Suffering that belongs to the fleshy body is transmuted into the serenity of the *Öl*-filled self that is extinguished in the reality of non-existence. Yet Ryu does not imply that this is an act of the imagination, nor some flight into mystical fancy. It turns, rather, on the spiritual and moral power of a person who, in the act of self-sacrifice, demonstrates himself to be a righteous person who in the act of dying manifests the spiritual maturity that knows the fullness of Truth. Becoming at that moment a 'Son of God', Jesus reveals the glory of God and stands as a symbol of righteousness for the rest of humankind. Jesus' willingness to accept self-sacrifice was, for Ryu, the factor that elevated Jesus above other sages as the one whose example was pre-eminently the way to fulfilling life through *Öl*. By his death on the cross, Jesus offered a perfect example of the master practitioner of filial piety and who thereby accomplished the completion of *Öl*. It is the event of Jesus' life that, above all others, translated his significance from that of teacher to activist, encouraging and enabling others to practice self-denying filial piety just as he did in his life.

In this connection Ryu used the term 'the power of execution', by which he meant that the self-sacrificial filial piety which he achieved empowers others to do likewise. Ryu expressed it thus:

The being who gives me the power of accomplishing full filial piety in relation to God is my Lord. Were there no power of execution, there would be no following Jesus but only looking upon him. I want to testify that the name of Jesus gives us the life and the soul, as the Holy Spirit of the truth at this

⁴¹ *Tasök-örok*, 166.

Clearly Ryu did not conceive of the relationship between Jesus and human beings in terms of Saviour and sinners, but rather as the sage who animates ‘the power of execution’ (*Kyŏltanryŏk*, 결단력) in his followers. This does not mean that Jesus acts vicariously on behalf of his followers, doing for them what they are unable to do for themselves. On the contrary, his act of self-sacrifice sets out the way which his disciples must follow in search of their own awakening. This is what Ryu meant by saying that “acknowledging Jesus as the master differs from believing in him. For me, Jesus is the only master.”⁴³

The key to understanding the ‘power of execution’ lies in the Confucian understanding of the master-disciple relationship. According to Ryu, this relationship entails much more than just following someone. It involves what he terms *Ongochisin* (온고지신, 溫故知新), meaning ‘reviewing the old and learning the new.’ In other words, “to listen, learn and find a new way makes it possible to build a relationship between master and disciple; on this basis, the way of humanity can be newly established.”⁴⁴ The *Ŏl* which existed in Jesus is found in every human being. Thus every human being is united with all others through the presence of *Ŏl*. As Jesus fulfilled the *Ŏl* in his own life, so other human beings who follow Jesus’ way are empowered by the same *Ŏl* to emulate his example and thus to live in harmony with the master. To follow Jesus is to realise that “my real self and the way, and my real self and the truth are not two,”⁴⁵ but are united in *Hana* (the One) through a life of self-sacrifice. This underlines, for Ryu, the importance of emphasising Jesus’ humanity: by refusing to elevate him to a metaphysical realm above other human beings, Ryu placed him firmly in the context of the actual experience of human life. This concept of Jesus as a human being enables Ryu to have a concrete faith, and this

⁴² Ryu Yŏngmo, “38 years later, when he had a calling, he entered the stage of faith”, *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*, Feb. 1942.

⁴³ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 138.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

faith brings a positive result – it gives people the power of execution.

In summary, therefore, it can be said that Ryu understood Jesus to be a human being born with the *Öl* of God, an ordinary man whose self-cultivation enabled him to fulfill the meaning of *Öl* and his own responsibility through awakening. Like a *kunja* in the Confucian context, Jesus surpassed the Confucian sages by the quality of his self-sacrifice through his death on the cross. Without attributing this a salvific value in terms of sacrificial atonement for the sins of others, Ryu interpreted Jesus death' as the perfect example of the master of filial piety (*Puja yuch'in*) who thereby accomplished the completion of *Öl*. In this moment of achievement, Jesus earned the privilege of being named 'the Only Begotten Son', although Ryu used the term as a metaphor of the divine-human relationship that Jesus embodied. At the same time, Jesus gives many people, including Ryu, the courage and determination to practise such filial piety in the same self-sacrificial way.

D. Building *Öl* Christology

Ryu's understanding of *Öl* and Jesus is an attempt to answer the question, 'who is Jesus?' in local Korean terms. His way of approaching the question lays epistemological emphasis on experience. Rooted in his own experience of *Kkaedalŭm*, his aim is to draw from the religiously plural experience of Korean culture, and to present a view of Jesus that Koreans can experience as being in continuity with their own religious worldview. This contrasts with the imported Western Christology that addresses the issue of Jesus' person by identifying two natures, one human and one divine, which are philosophically related to one another. Ryu's criticism of Western Christology was that it belonged to a philosophical world that was alien to Korean ways of thinking: and yet more problematically, it did not correspond to Korean religious experience, and therefore was incapable of stimulating a 'power of execution' through which Christology could become spiritually and ethically practical in Korean society.

Ryu's emphasis on experience does present an intellectual problem, however: is it legitimate to try to transpose insights based in experience into conceptual elements of an intellectual system? If this is permitted, a related problem arises: to what degree is this possible without distorting, reducing or dogmatising the experiential character of the original ideas? These are problems of which we need to be aware in this final section of this chapter, where an attempt will be made to draw together Ryu's ideas about Jesus and *Öl* into a coherent system of Christology. To this end, five Christological elements will be identified, and an attempt will be made to relate them to each other in a systematic form that explicates the inner coherence of Ryu's thinking.

1. Jesus as the Flesh Is Not Christ

Ryu's first statement, 'Jesus as the flesh is not Christ' immediately connects his thinking with Buddhist anthropology, which emphasises the corrupt nature of the human body. Confucianism also has strong tendencies to emphasise the natural disposition of the human condition towards sin. While human nature is understood as a gift from heaven, human beings, like other animals, are naturally motivated toward physical satisfaction and comfort and must struggle against these tendencies in order to achieve the real quality of 'humanity' (*jen*). In Ryu's thinking these trends of Buddhist and Confucian understanding of human nature correspond with the Pauline emphasis in the New Testament on the frailty of human flesh.

Jesus is a human being, and therefore shares fully with every other human being the limitations of the flesh, including what Christian theology calls original sin. This fleshly Jesus is subject to death in the manner of all mortal beings. In this respect Ryu is radically rational in his thinking about Jesus, and the logical outcome of his argument is to reject the orthodox Christian doctrine that Jesus' humanity was transformed by the divinity that was his by virtue of the Incarnation. For Ryu, this is to put Jesus beyond the reality of human experience and to place him alongside God. Ryu's warning against idolatry has already been noted. Equally important, Ryu argued that the divinisation of Jesus destroys his relationship with the rest of

humanity and places a gulf between Christology and human experience.

Therefore, he argued, Jesus is not Christ. From this negative construct it is correct to infer that Ryu was concerned to affirm Jesus' real humanity, with the limitations and defects of the human condition, in order to establish the premise that, in terms of human experience, Jesus can truly be said to be 'the lover', 'the brother' and 'the sister' of every human being.⁴⁶

2. Jesus Is Not God

Ryu's second statement about Jesus is equally provocative if judged by the criteria of Western Christology: Jesus, he argues, must be distinguished not only from Christ but also from God.

Just as Jesus in the flesh is not Christ, Jesus is not God. Jesus, like other human beings, was created by God. This assumes much of the argument that has been made in the previous section, and need not be repeated here. As previously noted, however, Ryu makes a negative assertion as the basis on which to proceed to a positive affirmation. In this case, by denying that Jesus is God, he offers what he regards as a correct way of speaking about Jesus' relationship with God in terms of local Korean experience. As already noted, this is presented in the Confucian terms of filial piety (*Puja yuch'in*).

It is in terms of filial piety that Ryu interpreted, for example, the parable of the rich young man in the Gospel of Mark (10: 17-31; cf. Matthew 19:16-13 and Luke 18: 18-30). He commented particularly on Jesus' question to the rich man: "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." (10:18) In these words attributed to Jesus, Ryu understood him to be making a clear distinction between himself and God. "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."⁴⁷ Building

⁴⁶ *Tasŏk Myŏngsangrok*, Vol. 2, 275; Vol. 3, 155. *Tasŏk Myŏngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Ryu) is a book which Kim Hŭngho translated as *Tasŏk-ilji* (Ryu's Thought and Diary) with exegetical notes.

⁴⁷ Mark 10: 1

on this distinction, Ryu centred his discussion of Jesus' relationship with God in the realm of ethics, rather than metaphysics. Rejecting Western philosophical ideas of hypostatic union with God, Ryu emphasised Jesus' obedience to God's will.

This makes perfect sense in terms of the Confucian experience of filial piety, where obedience of a son to a father manifests the highest quality of humanity (*jen*). But for this to be real, there has to be a real distinction between father and son. The father is father, and the son is son: in natural terms they remain separate from each other. Ryu accepted this emphasis in Confucian thought, though argued that in terms of Jesus' filial obedience to his Heavenly Father, he demonstrated that moral obedience leads to a harmony that unites in spirit what is distinguished in nature. It is in these terms that Ryu interpreted the New Testamental language of the 'sonship' of Jesus: he is Son of God in an ethico-spiritual, as distinct from a metaphysical, sense. By remaining human in nature, Jesus demonstrates that it is possible for all human beings to become, like him, sons of God.

3. *Öl* is Christ

It is in Jesus' realisation of the divine-human relationship of filial piety that Ryu is willing to name him as Christ. While not being Christ in his fleshly body, he becomes Christ through the quality of his obedience to God that Ryu sees to be manifested supremely in his willingness to undergo the Passion as an act of self-sacrifice. This seems to argue that 'Christhood' is a quality of obedience that grew within Jesus to such a degree that it transformed the limitations of his fleshly body by re-centering in a perfect spiritual relationship with God.

This is intelligible in terms of Ryu's understanding of *Öl*. The *Öl* is the spirit of God that is omnipresent throughout creation, being the inner reality of all that exists, from the inner being of humans through to the wider universe. It is humanity in terms of existing within every human being, uniting them as humankind, and also giving them the potential to fulfil the highest potentiality of humanness that Confucianism recognises as *jen*. *Öl* is also history in terms of continuity from past to present

generations of humankind, and it is the future into which humankind can evolve in relationship to God who is the foundation and source of *Öl*.⁴⁸

In relation to Jesus, Ryu offers a glimpse into his understanding of *Öl* in his poem entitled 'Meaning of Christ':

It is really difficult to know the meaning of Christ. How can we define it? If it means the 'anointed', it is nothing but an object that we can believe and follow. But if it means 'anointed by the Holy Spirit', it can be the Way that makes our true selves grow.⁴⁹

By this he seems to argue that 'Christ' is not an attribute given to Jesus by some form of external appointment. To be thus 'anointed' in the manner of a king or emperor, for example, means that Jesus could be acknowledged and obeyed only in an external or worldly sense. Ryu stresses that 'Christ' does not imply a physical or social authority that belongs to the flesh. Against this he contrasts anointing by the Holy Spirit. As previously suggested by this writer, it is possible to distinguish between Ryu's concepts of the 'spirit' and the 'Holy Spirit', even though he refers to both by the single word *Öl*: if the former (spirit) denotes the *Öl* that is present everywhere, and in every human being, by virtue of nature (*Söng*, 性), the latter (Holy Spirit) denotes the fulfilment of the potentialities of the spirit through self-cultivation that brings a human being into perfect harmony with God. This is what Jesus achieved, and why he may rightly be called Christ, in the sense of being 'anointed by the Holy Spirit.' Thus, while for Ryu it is wrong to identify Jesus as Christ in his fleshly body, it is right to identify him as Christ in his perfect obedience to God, in the spiritual union of the Son with the Father. In this light, Ryu's two statements – that Jesus in the flesh is not Christ, and that *Öl* is Christ – both relate to the reality of human experience and represent the core of Ryu's Christological manifesto.

⁴⁸ Park Yönggho, *Tasölk Sasang Chöngghae* (다석 사상 정해, Precise Explanation of Ryu's Thought) (Seoul: Hongjegak, 1994), 111.

⁴⁹ *Tasölk Myöngsangrok*, Vol. 2, 165. In original text: 基督名義: 基督意義政解難, 定義如之何處到, 傳油小我信順標, 注靈大我成長道 (*Tasölk-ilji*, Vol. 1, 518)

4. Jesus Is Not the Only Christ

Ryu's identification of *Öl* as Christ has two implications in terms of Jesus. The first, if the interpretation of the present writer is correct, is that Jesus becomes the Christ as the *Öl* within him is fulfilled through obedience to God. The second is that Christ in this sense, while being fully present in Jesus, must not be identified with Jesus uniquely, to the exclusion of Christ – i.e. *Öl* in fulfilment – being achieved by, and thus being present in other human beings as well. Theoretically it is possible for every human being to be 'anointed by the Holy Spirit' through the fulfilment of his or her *Öl* in filial obedience to God. It is certain, in Ryu's judgement, that other great religious figures – the Buddha and Confucius, to mention but two – were embodiments of Christ. Uniqueness in the absolute sense of the term is therefore not an attribute that Ryu was willing to apply to Jesus. He insists that Jesus is not the only Christ;⁵⁰ and that Christ does not apply to Jesus alone. He was even prepared to argue that writers of the New Testament were misguided if they indeed intended to claim uniqueness for Jesus as traditional Christian theology has generally maintained.⁵¹ But rather than disputing with the New Testament writers, Ryu typically interprets their statements about Jesus in terms of his own understanding of the *Öl*. As the New Testament language of divine sonship should be understood metaphorically in terms of filial piety, so Ryu argued that the language of uniqueness should be read in terms of the intimate faith experience that unites the Christian with Jesus, rather than as a literal statement that Jesus is the only way of Truth, to the exclusion of any other. Ryu clearly states:

Those who believe in Christianity say that only Jesus is the Christ, but this is not true. Christ is the Holy Spirit who comes from God, who is the eternal life.⁵²

It is interesting to note that, once again, Ryu uses a negative statement as the basis for establishing a positive theological point. That Jesus is not unique is his logic for

⁵⁰ Park Yŏnggho, *Tasŏk Sasang Chŏnghae* (다석 사상 정해, Precise Explanation of Ryu's Thought), 118.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵² *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 344.

affirming that all human beings are animated by the same *Öl* as was present in Jesus' life, and that Jesus' realisation of the Christic qualities of *Öl* therefore lies within the moral and spiritual capacity of all human beings. This point comes through clearly in the following quotations from Ryu's writings:

In terms of the life of *Öl*, the life of Jesus and that of God is one life. Supposing the *Öl* of Jesus is the seed, the *Öl* of God is the tree. Where does the seed come from? It comes from the tree. The origin of the seed is the tree. Jesus comes from God. When this seed begins to grow, it becomes a tree. This means going back to God. The *Öl* of Jesus is not the only seed. The *Öl* of every person is also the same seed. It is the role of religion to manifest this fact. In this light, Jesus and we are all the seeds of God. If Jesus is a first ripened fruit, we also need to become ripe fruit. We should believe in Jesus, God, and human beings.... In terms of *Öl*, Jesus and individuals are the seeds sent by God.⁵³

This leads Ryu to assert that:

There is no difference between you and me as humans. When human beings realise *Öl* in themselves, the individuals are not the ego any more but the true self. This true self is Christ and the son of God.⁵⁴

The purpose of Jesus' life and teaching can therefore be stated as follows: Jesus comes to this earth to manifest the fact that the true life of human beings is not lived according to the flesh but to *Öl*. Jesus teaches that the *Öl* which is given by God is Christ. Even though the *Öl* of the father is greater than that of the sons,⁵⁵ the *Öl* of the son is not born and does not die, just like that of the father, and is the eternal life.⁵⁶

Eternal life, therefore, lies within the capacity of all human beings. The point of Ryu's denial of the uniqueness of Jesus is to affirm the universality of God's relationship with humankind. Ryu emphasised that:

⁵³ *Tasökö-örök*, 148.

⁵⁴ Park Yönggho, *Tasökö Sasang Chöngghae* (다석 사상 정해, Precise Explanation of Ryu's Thought), 108.

⁵⁵ John 14:28

⁵⁶ *Tasökö-örök*, 137.

Öl Christ is coming forever.... As air is provided for our body, what provides Öl to us is Christ. Christ is the constantly coming and eternal life.⁵⁷

Ryu therefore stresses the continuity between God and Christ as parallel to that between Jesus and human beings. One of the most characteristic aspects of Ryu's Christology is that it restores the relation between human beings and God. Furthermore, it acknowledges that this restoration enables humans to find harmony with God in the actual experience of faith and to put it into practice in their personal lives.

5. Incarnation and Salvation

The purpose of Christology, according to Ryu, is not accomplished in philosophical speculation but in spiritual and ethical *praxis*. This returns our discussion to the issue of 'the power of execution', which was central to Ryu's Christological concerns. Any attempt to construct Ryu's Christological ideas into a system of Christology would be incomplete if it did not include the practical goal of his endeavours: to enable people and society to change from living according to the flesh to finding their real existence in harmony with the One (*Hana*) that is the Truth.

With this in mind, it is essential to address Ryu's understanding of the concepts of Incarnation and Salvation. Ryu uses the language of incarnation throughout his writings. In consistency with the points already made, however, it should be clear that he did not understand incarnation in either a literal or metaphoric sense of God becoming human, or becoming 'enfleshed'. This would contradict the basic premise of this thought, that the flesh and the spirit (*Öl*) are incompatible, if related, categories. He uses the term in a more general sense to mean that the Öl of God was radically present in Jesus' life, and pre-eminently in his self-sacrificial death, transforming Jesus' human characteristics so that he became truly united with God.

This understanding of incarnation implies a continuing process, rather than a

⁵⁷ *Tasōk-ilji*, Vol. 1, 181.

particular moment or event: for example, he remarks that it has nothing to do with the lineage of Jesus (Mark 22:46), and he attributes little significance to the birth of Jesus or to the beginning of his ministry. The *Öl* of God is eternal and universal, and therefore Ryu argues that it was ‘incarnated’ in Jesus’ life from its beginning, just as it is present in everyone’s life from birth to death. The process of cultivating the *Öl* within one’s life is expressed most characteristically in Ryu’s thought by the concept of enlightenment (*Kkaedalŭm*). It is through enlightenment that the *Öl* takes on what Ryu terms its Christic qualities.

Jesus’ enlightenment was pre-eminently demonstrated in his passion, and in light of his self-sacrificial death it is possible to see that his entire life was a way of self-transcendence that provides a sure example for others to follow. This is the ground on which Ryu justified his belief in the superiority of Jesus over other religious leaders or sages: the way of his death demonstrates the meaning of self-sacrifice as the ultimate expression of filial obedience to the Father. Jesus’ enlightenment can therefore be said to have been ‘incarnated’ in a life of self-sacrifice which it is possible for his followers to put into practice as he did.

The key concept, therefore, that distinguishes Jesus from other human beings is that of his perfectly fulfilling the qualities of *Öl* in his own life practice: as it were, his fulfilment cultivated the seed, so that it became a tree and bore fruit. The incarnation of God would have no meaning without this perfect fulfilment in practice. Consequently, Jesus becomes ‘the only master’, who provides the power of execution constantly through opening up his life by responding to God. To attend upon Jesus as the only master means to follow the spirit of Jesus without limit or reservation. So, one should practice self-cultivation as a disciple who is willing to die if necessary.

Salvation is understood accordingly in Ryu’s thought. Salvation is not achieved through simple faith in Jesus, essential as this is. Rather, salvation means to follow

Jesus' enlightenment, which manifests God's word and puts it into practice. Salvation is not achieved by believing that Jesus accomplished a perfect, final sacrifice for the whole world. It means realising the life of *Ōl* for oneself by following Jesus' example and carrying one's own cross. It was in these terms that Ryu interpreted Jesus' words: "not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven."⁵⁸

Ryu therefore believed that salvation is attained by a constant effort of personal sacrifice on the part of every human being. His emphasis lies on personal relationship with God and ethical responsibility. To echo Ryu's more poetic language, salvation means to germinate the seed of *Ōl* within one's spiritual self and overcome the corruptive powers of the fleshly body. In this way salvation, as a possibility for every human being, is extended throughout humankind, human society, and the world as a whole. The way of this salvation is set forth in the terms of ethico-spiritual teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and it is demonstrated in the practice of Jesus' life and passion. This means that salvation is achieved not by accumulated knowledge but by inner change and transformation, not by pursuing theoretical knowledge but by practising concrete virtues. In East-Asian terms, this is what is meant by self-cultivation, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

E. Conclusion

It has been recognised, and needs to be repeated, that Ryu's ideas about Jesus and Christ are not presented in systematic form in his diaries: rather, they appear as insights offered as reflections on selected passages of the New Testament, in poetic verses, in brief aphorisms and analects. An attempt has been made in this chapter to gather these fragmentary data into a coherent system of Christology. If the several main elements that have been examined do not perfectly relate to one another, or if they leave certain questions unanswered, a general pattern of thought nonetheless

⁵⁸ Mark 7:21

emerges.

It can perhaps best be termed an *Öl* Christology, Ryu's concept of *Öl* being the normative element of his response to the question: who is Jesus? As the tradition of Western Christian theology has answered this question in terms of the eternal *logos*, or Word of God being incarnated in Jesus Christ, Ryu answers in terms of the Korean concept of *Öl*, spirit, which he elaborates with reference to Confucian and Buddhist ideas as well as his interpretation of the New Testament. From Ryu's perspective, the difference is crucial. *Logos* has its origins in Greek philosophy, and in the hands of the Greco-Roman theologians of the early centuries of Christian history, it was developed in an intellectual world that was ignorant of, or was ignored by the intellectual world of East Asia. *Öl*, as interpreted by Ryu, is rooted not in abstract intellectual speculations, but in the experience of enlightenment (*Kkaedalŭm*) which gives an Asian an alternative epistemology that results in an authentically Asian way of knowing reality and of transforming life.

Without passing judgement on Ryu's *Öl* Christology, it can be recognised as having the merit of being a local theology, in the sense of its being an attempt to offer a local, or indigenous answer to the question of who Jesus is, or of how Jesus can be understood, in Korean culture. Ryu's answer clearly does not conform to the pattern of Western Christology, and insofar as Western (Greco-Roman) Christology has been the normative influence on what the historic Church recognises as orthodox Christology, Ryu's *Öl* Christology could easily be rejected as unorthodox. So it has been by Western-founded churches in Korea, especially of the Protestant tradition to which Ryu himself once belonged. This is not the place to discuss denominational or political factors that may have been relevant to this reaction. Suffice it to note that Ryu himself was not a man to pass judgement on others. Quoting the remark attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John (8:15) that "you (Scribes and Pharisees) judge according to the flesh, I judge no one," he preferred to hold his own counsel. The real question is: by what standard is local Christology to be judged? Is there a

meta-Christology that is valid for all places and times? Or are there not, in reality, multiple local Christologies in which Christians in different cultures and societies seek to answer the question: who is Jesus, and what does he mean for them in their particular contexts?

To the significance of such questions it will be our responsibility to return by way of conclusion to this thesis as a whole. Relative to issues raised in this chapter, it should be recognised, in conclusion, that Ryu harboured no ambitions for his *Ŏl* Christology to become a universal way of thinking about Jesus, or that it should replace the *logos* Christology of the Western tradition. His diaries provide no evidence to suggest that he wanted to bring these two different Christologies into dialogue with one another. Indeed, it was his personal discipline to avoid doing anything that would harm the belief of other Korean Christians, and therefore he preferred not to give public expression to his Christological views unless he was invited to do so. While respecting this reserve on Ryu's part, an attempt will be made in Chapter 7 of this thesis to engage Ryu's understanding of *Han'uhnim* and his *Ŏl* Christology with Western theological approaches to religious pluralism.

Before turning to this topic, it is necessary to follow Ryu in a further important aspect of his thought: his concern to offer a practical way of applying his theology and Christology. This raises the issue of *Kwi-il* or 'returning to the One', to which this thesis must now address itself.

Chapter Six. Building a Theological Praxis: *Kwi-il* (귀 일, 歸一, Returning to the One)

A. Introduction

One of the features that has emerged from the discussion in the last two chapters of central elements of Ryu Yŏngmo's theology is the importance that he gave to the practical implementation of his ideas. It has been noted that these were rooted in, and to significant degree sprang from, his personal experience of faith in Jesus as Christ. Experience was also the touchstone by which he measured the quality of his theological interpretations, his desire always being that his ideas should be accessible to, and acceptable by the Korean experience of a religiously plural culture and society. But Ryu did not think of experience in passive or sensory terms, but rather as a stimulus for action. This point emerged quite clearly from Ryu's interpretation of Jesus being the Christic *Ŏl*: closely as this resonates with Korean cultural understanding of *Ŏl*, Ryu was emphatic that it meant nothing if it did not have 'the power of execution' that would stimulate the Korean follower of Jesus to appropriate spiritual and ethical action.

This chapter will focus, therefore, on the practical dimension of Ryu's thought through analysis of what he meant by the concept of *Kwi-il*, which can be translated as 'returning to the One'.

First, we will investigate the religious meaning of *Kwi-il* within the Buddhist and Confucian traditions, which are the sources from which Ryu adapted the concept into his Christian theological framework. Secondly, we will re-examine Ryu's understanding of Jesus in the theological dimension of *Kwi-il*. Thirdly, we will discuss Ryu's conception of *Han'uhnim* in the framework of *Kwi-il*. On these bases the chapter will conclude with a recapitulation of Ryu's ideas, interpreted in the context of his religious practice.

B. *Kwi-il* as a Theological Framework

1. Defining *Kwi-il*

Kwi-il is the compound of two Korean terms: *Kwi* (귀, 歸), meaning ‘return’ or ‘returning’ and *Il* (일, 一), another word for ‘One’. The juxtaposition of these two terms gives the meaning of ‘returning to the One’. It is an active concept that expresses movement and direction, the movement of ‘returning’ to a place of origin, the origin signifying the destination to which the action is directed. Different explanations of *il* as ‘the One’ are possible, depending on the particular worldview or value system in which it is used. As a consequence, it is essential to investigate the understandings of *Kwi-il* in the context of Korean religious pluralism, for this provides the conceptual background against which Ryu himself used the term.

As seen earlier, in Chapter 1, Korean religious pluralism comprises the layering and integration of different religious traditions – *Mu*, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Many concepts in Korean religious thought occur in each of these traditions, where they are nuanced in particular ways which then become interactive with the same idea as understood in the other religions. *Kwi-il* is an example of such plurally textured meaning. This gives it a rich depth of meaning in relation to the epistemological structure of Korean religious pluralism, and makes it an important tool of theological hermeneutics in the Korean religious context. It is with good reason, therefore, that Ryu adopted it as a key expression for his local theology.

The earliest development of the concept of *Kwi-il* can be identified with the thought of the seventh-century Korean Buddhist scholar, Wŏnhyo (원효), whose significance in the history of Buddhism under the *Silla* kingdom was discussed in Chapter 1.¹ Wŏnhyo introduced the notion of *Kwi-il* into Korean religious thought as part of his successful effort to indigenise Buddhism in Korea. It was Wŏnhyo who endowed Chinese Buddhism with Korean characteristics and developed an indigenous

¹ The background of Wŏnhyo’s thought is fully discussed in Chapter 1. See that chapter for his efforts to integrate Buddhist denominations as well as thought.

Buddhist theology in the Korean context. His universalistic and syncretic Buddhist philosophy is grounded in a harmonisation of the principles and forms of different Buddhist movements. On this basis he succeeded in reconciling the Buddhist Hinayana and Mahayana traditions, as well as the fundamental tension within Buddhism of his day in the dogmatic confrontation between Madhyamika and Yogacara Buddhism.² This led him to construct his distinctive form of Buddhism, known as *T'ong Pulgyo* (통불교), or synthetic Buddhism, which has been widely influential in Korean history. Harmonisation was therefore a characteristic feature of Wŏnhyo's thought. His constant concern was to reconcile conflicting traditions. By harmonising different perspectives on a common issue Wŏnhyo believed it was possible to find the ultimate truth. A second defining characteristic of his method was his insistence that any theory of reconciliation must be capable of being put into practice. Practical application was his criterion both of the effectiveness of an idea and of the quality of the idea itself.

To this end he introduced the theory and practice of *Kwi-il*, returning to the One. It was by this means that he succeeded in commending Buddhism to wide popular acceptance in Korea, engaging both the aristocratic and subordinate classes in a common practice that instated Buddhism as the predominant religion of the *Silla* kingdom. Park Chonghong is therefore correct in stating that “the fundamental distinctiveness of Wŏnhyo's thought is that it harmonises various denominations' disputes and leads different ideas to reach *Kwi-il*”.³

² Madhyamika (Sanskrit: 'Intermediate') is an important school in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. Its name derives from its having sought a middle position between the realism of the Sarvastivada ('Doctrine that All Is Real') school and the idealism of the Yogacara ('Mind Only') school. Yogacara (Sanskrit: 'Practice of Yoga [Union]') is also called 'Doctrine of Consciousness'. Yogacara attacked both the complete realism of Theravada Buddhism and the provisional practical realism of the Madhyamika school. For details, see Ch'oi Pyŏnghŏn, “Hanguk Pulgyo ŭi Chongae (한국 불교의 전개, The Development of Korean Buddhism)”, in *Hanguk Sasang ŭi Simch'ŭng* (한국사상의 심층, The Depth of Korean Thought), 91.

³ Park Chonghong, *Hanguk Sasangsa* (한국 사상사, History of Korean Thought) (Seoul: Ilsinsa, 1966), 10. According to Oh Kangnam, Wŏnhyo's view is “a standpoint without a standpoint, which means to pass over not only eternalism and nihilism but also a non-view”. See Oh Kangnam, “Hanguk ŭi Chonggyojŏk Tawŏnjuŭi rūl wihan Ch'okmaerosŏui Han Sasang (한국의 종교적 다원주의를 위한 촉매로서의 한 사상, Han Thought as a Catalyst for Religious Pluralism in Korea)”, in *Hansasang ŭi Iron kwa Silje*, (한사상의 이론과 실제, Theory and Practice of Han Thought), 220.

As regards the concept itself, Wŏnhyo interpreted *Kwi-il* as a ‘returning to the One’ in terms of returning to an original mind (*Kwi-il sim-wŏn*, 歸一心原). This meant going back to the origin of ideas, believing that all ideas originate in a single source or preternatural mind (*sim-wŏn*).⁴ By returning to this original source, Wŏnhyo understood *Kwi-il* as the means of actualising the original idea through a renewed intellectual awakening to its reality. In other words, *Kwi-il* seeks to actualise ‘the One’ as the source of all values and the harmonisation of all conflicts.⁵ In this sense Wŏnhyo considered *Kwi-il* to be the core method of his Buddhist theology. Furthermore, the harmonisation which he sought to achieve by this method did not belong to the realm of theory alone, but required practical expression in order to be complete. ‘Returning to the One’ was therefore a process, and provided a means for all people to develop their lives to the fullest possible extent in relation to a common source.⁶

Wŏnhyo’s *Kwi-il* thought was adopted by Chinul (지눌, 1158-1210), who helped to usher in the golden era of Buddhism in Koryŏ (고려, 918-1392). Chinul uses the same concept, though expressed in the slightly different term of *chin-sim* (眞心) as the One, meaning ‘one as a truthful heart’. By this he wished to emphasise the affective, more than the cognitive nature of the original source of ideas. According to this view, *chin-sim* is “the nature that all people have, and the foundation from which every world originates.”⁷ Like Wŏnhyo, Chinul emphasised *Kwi-il* not only in terms of the intellectual meaning but also as an ethical practice.⁸ Neither scholar was satisfied with acknowledging ‘the One’ (*il*) in theoretical terms alone, but insisted that *Kwi-il* must be fulfilled in a practical sense. In other words, both Wŏnhyo and

⁴ The term, *il*, from *Kwi-il* in *Kwi-il sim-wŏn*, is a modifier and means ‘the wellspring of the one mind’. In this sense, even though *Kwi-il* is used independently from *Kwi-il sim-wŏn*, the perception of the wellspring is implied in it.

⁵ Yi Kiyŏng, “Pulgyo wa Hangukjŏk Yŏngwŏn, (불교와 한국적 영원, Buddhism and Korean Thought of Eternality)”, *Pulgyo wa Sahoe* (불교와 사회, Buddhism and Society), 1967, 49.

⁶ Yi Kiyŏng, “Hanguk Pulgyo ūi Yŏksa Insik (한국 불교의 역사 인식, Historical Understanding of Korean Buddhism)”, in ed., *Hanguk Ch’ŏlhakhoe* (한국 철학회, Association of Korean Philosophy), *Hanguk Ch’ŏlhak Yŏngu*, Vol. 2 (한국 철학 연구, A Study of Korean Philosophy) (Seoul: Tongmyongsa, 1978), 37-38.

⁷ Chinul, *Chinsim Chikksŏl* (진심 직설, 眞心 直說, Sincere Mind Indicative Words) (Seoul: Tongguk University, 1984), 272.

⁸ Yi Chongik, *Pojo ūi Sasang Ch’oegye* (보조의 사상체계, Thought Structure of Pojo) (Seoul: Tongguk University, 1972), 208.

Chinul believed that to acknowledge *il* without putting it into practice was useless.

This Buddhist understanding of *Kwi-il* finds its parallel in Korean Confucianism, though here the discussion was focussed more on the nature of existence. This refers to the philosophical debate among Confucian scholars regarding the relationship between two forces of existence, ‘the principle’(*i*, 理, [li]) and the ‘material force’(*ki*, 氣, [chi]). Two main traditions of thought developed in Korea over this issue. One was dualist in the sense that *i* and *ki* were regarded as separate forces of existence. Thus T’oegye Yi Hwang (퇴계 이황, 退溪 李滉, 1501-1570), argued for *i/ki ilwŏnron* (dualism), on the basis of Chu Hsi’s understanding of *i* as the Supreme Ultimate (*T’aegŭk*, 太極): accordingly, *i* constitutes *a priori* existence, by contrast to which *ki* is the essence of the myriad phenomena of created existence. T’oegye emphasised the formative or normative element of *i* as the basis of the activity of *ki*, and discussed *i* as the existential force that masters or controls *ki*.

If it is reasonable to characterise T’oegye’s position as dualistic, the counter-argument of Yulgok advocated a monistic understanding of existence (*i/ki ilwŏnron*). This maintained that *i* and *ki*, while being distinct from one another, existed in a mutuality of inseparable harmony. In a powerful analogy, he likened this to water: clear water represents Nature’s original force of Nature (*i*), while dirty water denotes the myriad phenomena of physical Nature; the water has the same properties, but it assumes different aspects. To vary the analogy: pour water in a clear vessel, and when the vessel moves, so does the water. The relationship between *i* and *ki* is the same: they exist separately, but complement each other perfectly so that it is impossible to distinguish them.⁹

It is clearly Yulgok’s intention to emphasise the inseparable complementarity of *i* and *ki*. He expressed it as follows in his own terms: *i* and *ki* are “the one as well as two

⁹ *Yulgok Chŏnsŏ*, 10; quoted from Lee Peter, *Korean Civilization*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 636.

simultaneously, and two as well as the one at the same time.”¹⁰

Whether one opts for duality (*i/ki iwōnron*) or monism (*i/ki ilwōnron*) is not the issue that needs to be pursued further in this discussion. Rather, what is common to both philosophical positions is the concept of *Kwi-il*, meaning that true knowledge of existence entails a ‘returning to the One’ in terms either of *i*, whether this is understood as the Supreme Absolute separate from *ki* or in indissoluble relationship with *ki*. In either case, Confucians agree that *Kwi-il* is not confined to philosophical speculation. Yulgok is particularly emphatic on this point, and insists that *Kwi-il* also necessitates a practice of life. In this regard he proposed three ways of putting *Kwi-il* into practice: *kōkyōng* (거경, 居敬) means ‘adhering to seriousness’ and implies the disciplining of one’s intentions to ensure a seriousness of thought, word and action; *kunlli* (궁리, 窮理) means ‘investigating *i*’ and implies a spiritual and intellectual alertness to understanding the inner reality of things; and *yōkhaeng* (역행, 力行) or ‘strenuous effort’ means to apply oneself to righteous living in all aspects of life.¹¹ Through these three practices Yulgok initiated a socio-cultural movement that embraced the lower classes in Confucian society. For example, he suggested various reforms of the Confucian tradition that divided society into social classes, and strongly advocated giving more rights to the lower class. In a Confucian-centred society, Yulgok played an important role in popularising Confucianism among the Korean people, overcoming some of the social divisions within Confucian society and presenting an understanding of Confucianism that combined theory and practice.

This brief background to the ways in which *Kwi-il* has been understood in the Korean religious traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism is sufficient to show how deeply the concept is rooted in Korean philosophical and social thought, and how effective it has been in stimulating evolution within Korean society.

¹⁰ *Yulgok Chōnsō* (율곡 전서, Collection of Yulgok), Vol. 1, 198.

¹¹ Yu Ch’oha, *Hanguk Sasangsa ūi Insik* (한국 사상의 인식, Acknowledgement of Korean Thought), 137.

2. Ryu's Understanding of *Kwi-il*

The concept of *Kwi-il* is found throughout Ryu's analects and diaries. The references are either of a meditative kind, or take the form of practical instructions for his disciples, inviting them to practise *Kwi-il* as the means of realising religious truth. It is generally accurate to say that in the diaries, Ryu speaks more personally in terms of *Kwi-il* as the way of self-cultivation for himself, whereas in the analects he lays out the actual practice of *Kwi-il* in order to help his disciples to cultivate their *Öl*.

In the diaries, Ryu struggles with the existential question 'what do I live for?' He asks this repeatedly throughout the events of each day. He began writing his diary on the day when he predicted his death, announcing that he would die within a year. The first entry carries the title: "because of one-day". What exactly this means is unclear. It will be recalled from the biographical discussion of Ryu's life in Chapter 3, however, that a basic part of his discipline of self-cultivation was 'to count the days', meaning that he undertook to live each day for itself, 'today', without thinking of yesterday or tomorrow. Since tomorrow cannot be known, there is no tomorrow, so today alone is important. In his writings he emphasised that human beings do not live in past or future time, but rather one day at a time, and from this perspective he tried to understand the metaphysical world. In other words, his search for religious truth was rooted in his existential daily experience, and this include his daily writings in his diary. Kim Hŭngho is correct therefore in interpreting Ryu's diary as a witness of how he tried day by day 'to live thinking God's words' and 'to live with God'. Ryu used some striking metaphors to express the self-disciplined concentration that this involved. For example, he used the metaphor of the flame of a candle, silently burning so that the candle melts: "To live as if burning one day at a time. To live by burning myself. To live without myself. To live with light. Because of one-day, I live for God."¹²

According to Ryu, therefore, human beings should to live as if they were consuming

¹² *Tasöck Myöngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasöck), Vol 1, 19.

themselves. The flame gradually consumes the candle until, at the last moment, nothing is left but the flame, before it is also extinguished. Nothing is left unconsumed, and even the light of the flame passes from existence to non-existence. If the burning of the flame seems effortless, its achievement is great. No less effort is required of human self-discipline in the way of *Kwi-il*. Rather than withdrawing from life in an ascetic retreat, it means embracing life fully and energetically while constantly seeking to penetrate through its superficial facets in order to reach for its source. Self-sacrifice is an essential part of this effort, so that one's fleshly nature should not impede one's search for harmony with the inner *Öl*. It is impossible to understand Ryu's life and thought correctly without recognising the importance of *Kwi-il* in his daily discipline. Thus Ryu's theology should be understood in terms of what he discovered through *Kwi-il*. In Ryu's theological usage, *Kwi-il* means 'returning to the One' in the reality of *Hana*. He stated this clearly in the following remark:

To return to God and complete God's word is the true way of unification and Heaven.¹³

In Ryu's thinking, therefore, 'returning' is always towards God. 'The true way of unification and Heaven' is achieved through 'completing God's word.' This is the purpose of religion, and sets forth the way of salvation and fulfilment for human beings.

Elaborating on his understanding of salvation, Ryu wrote:

This relative world where you and I live is of short duration, and finally we have to stand in front of the Absolute. There is the One and only Word. Even though myriad things are splendid, they originate in the One. Thus, I believe that we eventually return to the One. Because Heaven is justice, to achieve the final victory means to enter Heaven. To enter Heaven implies to win what we

¹³ *Tasök Myöngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasök), Vol 1, 34. Original text is as follows: 統一爲言人間譌, 歸一成言天道誠, 太初一命宗教義, 咸有一德信仰城. *Tasök-ilji* (다석일지) vol. 1 55. 6. 2.

have to win and become the One.¹⁴

Salvation is here understood in the ultimate terms of unification with *Hana*. While it is true that the relationship between God and humankind is in one sense constant because of the *Öl* of God that subsists in every human being, the relationship is weakened by the distinction between physical phenomena – the myriad things – and the non-existent reality of God's existence. Ryu's emphasis in the above passage is that the myriad things all 'originate in the One', and it is by 'returning to the One' that they fulfil themselves, making real the potentiality that the *Öl* of God invests in them. So Ryu sees a complementarity between 'originating' and 'returning'. Physical existence is a process of emerging from God, while fulfilment of existence means returning to God.

While the act of returning through *Kwi-il* requires spiritual and moral decision, there is also a sense in which Ryu places it beyond the range of human choice. In the following passage he suggests that everything in nature is disposed to returning to God:

As all trees and plants miss the sun, carrying the sun on their heads, and longing for the sun by reaching up to the sky, because they come from the sun, we human beings always miss Heaven: we carry Heaven on our heads, and long for Heaven by reaching up to Heaven, because we come from God. *Kungsin* (궁신, longing for God) through which human beings seek God seems to be the nature of human beings just as plants follow the sun.¹⁵

These two ideas are not in conflict, however. As the myriad things originate from God, they are naturally disposed to returning to God. The dependence of trees and plants on light shows that all of creation depends on God as its source and destination. Human beings are not excluded from this general truth, but unlike other creatures human beings have the capacity of free will and must decide to act spiritually and ethically in ways which harmonise with the natural inclination toward God that is

¹⁴ *Tasö-örok*, 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

evident throughout creation. The consequence of the conscious human decision to ‘return to the One’ is that a human being can enter into the most beautiful relationship with God, as a son knows the father as the source of unimaginable love. It is God’s love that invites the human being to make the moral decision for *Kwi-il*, making real in his or her spiritual and ethical life what is already real in nature.¹⁶ In this light, Ryu concludes that *Kwi-il* indicates that all that comes from Heaven is returning to Heaven. Religions all set forth the ‘way’ to realise the truth, and thus to experience life in its fullest meaning. Ryu applies this generalisation to all religions, though his primary concern is to demonstrate that this is the true way of understanding the Christian religion, and that the person to follows the way of *Kwi-il* as represented in the life and teaching of Jesus¹⁷ can be a true Christian. Expressing this in the form of a question, Ryu asked: “Isn’t he a true Christian who misses and loves this *Hana* as *nim* (님)?”¹⁸

Once again it is through metaphoric language that Ryu elaborated his understanding of *Kwi-il*. A metaphor that he used quite often was that of ‘grasping’ (*putjabmŭn*, 붙잡는) for God.¹⁹ This indicates holding God at any time. Ryu says in his diaries that the only thing that human beings can do is to ‘grasp *Hana*’. Along with the metaphor of ‘burning’, Ryu accentuates the necessity of practising *Kwi-il*, as it is an irresistible command not to lose God. ‘Burning’ ourselves and grasping God describe the metaphysical concept of *Kwi-il* more concretely in terms of Ryu’s theology.

C. Jesus in the Perspective of *Kwi-il*

Ryu’s understanding of Jesus in relationship with Christ was explored in Chapter 5. There it was shown that the key element in Ryu’s understanding of this relationship is the *Öl*, or the spirit that he identified as being originated in God and subsisting in

¹⁶ *Tasö-örok*, 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁸ *Nim* (님) is an honorific suffix in Korean. Therefore, *Hana* (하나) with *nim* (님) becomes *Hananim*, which means God in pure Korean. *Tasö-örok*, 51.

¹⁹ *Tasok-ilji*, 57. 9. 5.

all of creation and every human being. According to Ryu's view, the *Öl* was fully realised in Jesus, for which reason he is recognised as Christ through his perfection of his filial relationship with the *Han'uhnim* as Father. We therefore characterised Ryu's Christology as *Öl* Christology. The question to be examined in this section is how Ryu interpreted his understanding of Jesus in practical terms in the context of *Kwi-il*. It is immediately noticeable that Ryu used various adjectives in his description of Jesus that emphasised that Jesus achieved in life God's will for him. For example, he described him as "the realised logos and the completed prophet", using the terms Jesus and Christ interchangeably, consistent with his thought that it was through perfecting the *Öl* within him that Jesus became the Christ. Equally he emphasised that "Christianity is a way to reach God through Christ".²⁰ This practical dimension is also evident in the naturalist metaphors that Ryu used in order to picture the relationship between Jesus and God: the 'spring' and the 'sea'; the 'seed' and the 'tree'.²¹ A spring (Jesus) eventually finds its way (Christ) to the sea (God), just as a seed germinates, grows and finally becomes a tree. In both cases motion and action are essential, although in neither case can they be seen. So with *Kwi-il* there is ceaseless movement toward God, and this is elemental to Ryu's understanding of the dynamic that infuses Jesus in relationship to Christ and God. Without *Kwi-il*, these relationships would remain potential but inert, and therefore unfulfilled.

Jesus' whole mission as witnessed in the Bible can be expressed therefore in terms of the process of *Kwi-il*. Ryu states:

The way, the truth, and the life that Jesus sees are as follows: the way means to come from Heaven to earth and go back to Heaven, the truth means to walk this way, and the life means that father and son become one through a great light. The son of a person – the Son of Man in terms of the Bible – comes from Heaven and goes back to Heaven. To walk this way unswervingly is the truth. Consequently, to meet God is the life. In terms of a railway, the rails are the way, trains are the truth, and arrival is the life. In this sense, there is no

²⁰ *Tasö-örok*, 148.

²¹ Park Yönggho, *Ryu Yongmo üi Yugyo Sasang* (류영모의 유교 사상, Confucian Thought of Ryu Yöngmo), 214.

difficulty in our life at all.²²

In the perspective of *Kwi-il*, the notion of *Öl* in Ryu's Christology subsists in the theological frame of practice. The most important factor of *Kwi-il* in Jesus' life was his filial piety. Ryu identified Jesus as a faithful son who devoted his whole life to demonstrating filial piety to God. In terms of *Kwi-il*, Jesus is a 'faithful son'. In Chapter 5 we traced the Confucian origins of this notion, the 'faithful son' who devotes himself to filial piety. Ryu considered filial piety the most fundamental and important factor in human life, because for Koreans it has been one of the most influential elements in Confucian thought and practice, playing a principal role not only in domestic, social, political, and economic terms but also in the religious life of individuals. It was also noted that Ryu believed that the model of filial piety that is manifested in Jesus' life surpasses that of the Confucian tradition itself:

The filial piety that Confucianism teaches us is not enough. True filial piety means to devote ourselves to God. We are unable to show filial piety to our physical father unless we devote ourselves to the father of heaven first. The true object of filial piety is God. Those who know God can devote themselves to the utmost filial piety.²³

It is in light of filial piety that Ryu interpreted the New Testament use of the term 'son of God' in respect of Jesus' relationship with God. Jesus is the 'beloved son',²⁴ the 'only begotten son',²⁵ and the 'first son'.²⁶ All these terms Ryu accepts as metaphors that express the distinctive relationship between Jesus and God that results from filial piety, no matter whether these designations are based on Jesus' own confession or the authors' faith. Jesus as a son was ultimately willing to surrender himself for his neighbours through the love (*agapé*) that he received from God within the ethico-spiritual dynamic of his filial piety. Jesus turned away from marriage and family, from the possibilities of wealth and property, and finally from

²² *Tasö-örok*, 167.

²³ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁴ Mark 1:11; 9:7; 12:6.

²⁵ John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9.

²⁶ Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Hebrews 1:6; the Revelation 1:5.

saving his own life in order to open up a new horizon of filial piety for other people. In this Jesus manifests his whole-hearted obedience to his father's will. He lives the life of a son who does not disobey his father's will in the smallest detail, and whose reward is spiritual harmony with his father. Herein lies his realisation of the method of *Kwi-il*, returning to the One who, as a loving Father, receives his son in an intimacy of relationship in which – as in Yulgok's monistic interpretation of *i* and *ki* – actual differentiation cannot be distinguished.²⁷

As shown earlier, the notion of *Kwi-il* does not imply only, or even primarily, a return to the One in a metaphysical sense. Equally important in Ryu's thinking is the idea of *Kwi-il* as a form of upright belief and commitment that realises the process of return (*kwi*) in daily life. In this sense, Jesus' teaching and faith based on filial piety unto death is the ideal model of *Kwi-il* in terms of Ryu's thought. As a true model of *Kwi-il*, Jesus challenges human beings to reflect on their existing habits, their rigid thinking, and their false values, and leads them to return to God. Furthermore, Jesus, by his action of *Kwi-il*, shows that a human's value is realised in the action of returning to God. The essential truth of the *Kwi-il* of Jesus is that this is a way not of death but ultimately of life. Therefore, Jesus can proclaim that "whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?"²⁸

What, then, does it mean to say that *Kwi-il* is a way of life? What is the concrete aspect of Jesus' practice of filial piety? It is in answering these questions that Ryu deals with the issues of Jesus' death and resurrection.

If this appears to be a contradiction, it must be remembered that the heart of Ryu's personal religious experience was his 'Awakening' of *Kkaedalŭm*. Our discussion of this in Chapter 3 drew attention to the importance of *Kkaedalŭm* in terms of

²⁷ *Tasŏk Myŏngsangrok* (다석 명상록, Meditations of Tasŏk), Vol 1, 68.

²⁸ Matthew 16:25-26.

overcoming the ‘fatal uncertainties’ of physical death by anticipating it spiritually, dying already in this life to the uncertainties of the material world and being re-born into the eternal existence of God, from which all life flows.

Ryu’s view of Jesus’ death should be understood within this same framework of thought. “The heart of religion is death,” he wrote: “to practice dying is philosophy, and to conquer death is religion.”²⁹ Nor is death an end in itself: “dying is for raising life.”³⁰ Throughout Ryu’s diaries, it is clear that Ryu predicts his own death and prepares for it. This is because he believes that his whole life is a process of raising life in order to live a life that overcomes death. Death is something which has to be suppressed, and thus Ryu attempts to overcome death in order to enter God’s world, Heaven.³¹

In like manner, Ryu understands Jesus’ death, in terms of *Kwi-il*, as having a strong connection with his whole life. In the context of Jesus’ life, it might be thought that his death on a cross was something he could have avoided.³² But, Ryu argues, he chose not to, but rather accepted it as part of his whole-hearted devotion to his father’s will. Ryu states:

Faced with death, Jesus said, “I came to die in this world, came to die... Death means that a tree becomes fire. It is time for the son of God to be honoured.”³³

Ryu interprets this as part of Jesus’ *Kwi-il*, and it is noticeable that he uses the same metaphor of ‘burning’ for Jesus’ death as he did for *Kwi-il*. Ryu asserts that allowing his physical life to be consumed in this way, Jesus in his death revealed God’s glory in terms of *Kwi-il*, and that Jesus became the Son of God in terms of filial piety:

To bleed on the cross is to reveal God’s glory, and to become a son of God. The

²⁹ *Tasō-ōrok*, 148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 147.

³² *Ibid.*, 148.

³³ *Ibid.*

meaning of becoming a son of God is to rise above death..... However evil this world may be, it would be cleansed and put right by Jesus' blood.³⁴

For Ryu, Jesus' death is the complete practice of *Kwi-il*, and this practice involves suppressing even death. In other words, the practice of filial piety, as an important aspect of *Kwi-il*, has to be continued even by overcoming death.

If Jesus' death is the process of *Kwi-il* itself, how does Ryu interpret the meaning of resurrection? In characteristic fashion he explains it with a metaphor: Jesus' death is the falling blossom and his resurrection is the fruit that grows in the blossom's place.

Blossoming flowers are the truth, falling blossoms are the cross. The cross is the truth. To believe in the cross is to believe the truth. To suppress death by life is resurrection."³⁵

Resurrection therefore denotes a state of new life that is achieved by overcoming physical death. This is what Jesus achieved perfectly through *Kwi-il*. It is fair to conclude from Ryu's diaries, however, that he was more interested in the ways in which Jesus' death and resurrection reveal the processes of *Kwi-il* than in what they say of Jesus' life itself. Ryu was not concerned about the resurrection of Jesus' body, but rather about the process of overcoming death. This is what is important, in his judgement, in terms of the actual practice of *Kwi-il*.

In other words, the real meaning of the resurrection is that Jesus lived in constant awareness of God's presence and God's will, so that his heart was constantly open to God. In this manner Jesus kept practising *Kwi-il* ceaselessly until his death, and in overcoming the physical aspect of death, he attained eternal life. Ryu emphasised that Jesus commanded his disciples to live as he did, and showed them how to put devotion to God into action. Thus, his message to his disciples was to practice *Kwi-il*. The disciples comprehended Jesus as the perfect master, who put *Kwi-il* into practice

³⁴ Kim Hüngho, *Chesori* (제소리), 156.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

as a faithful son. For them, he was the perfect model of a master who does not merely teach the truth but lives it as well. Ryu insists that Jesus' consistency of speech and action enabled the disciples to believe strongly enough that they could bear the cross with Jesus.

Finally, in the light of *Kwi-il*, Ryu was able to insist that metaphorical statements about Jesus in the New Testament – that he was 'the only begotten son', the only way to salvation, and the only point of contact between God and human beings – express a real truth. He explained the metaphors in terms of filial piety, but the connection that he established between filial piety and *Kwi-il* in the sense that Jesus' filial piety led to his harmony with God, meant that Jesus as Christ had a real spiritual unity with God. Expressions such as – "I and the Father are one",³⁶ "no one comes to the Father, but by me",³⁷ and "he who has seen me has seen the Father"³⁸ – Ryu interpreted as metaphysical statements that find their reality in *Kwi-il*. Thus, he explained:

The Father and I are one as the life of *Öl*. No one comes to the Father but by my *Öl*. He who has seen the life of *Öl* in me has seen the life of *Öl* in the Father. In terms of *Öl*, the Father and I are the same.³⁹

D. God in the Perspective of *Kwi-il*

To understand Jesus in terms of *Kwi-il* means to focus on the meaning of 'returning'. The destination to which the processes of 'returning' is directed is the One who is God. Ryu emphasises that it is God who calls Jesus to practice *Kwi-il*, and constantly bestows the power to achieve this through *Öl*, now in the sense of Holy Spirit. It is through this achievement that God gives the most powerful example of *Kwi-il* through Jesus' life. Therefore nothing can or should be said about Jesus other than in

³⁶ John 10:30.

³⁷ John 14:6.

³⁸ John 14:9.

³⁹ *Tasök-örok*, 216.

terms of his relationship with God. This point has been emphasised in the Bible, where Jesus does not teach that “you shall love your neighbour” except in the prior context that “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind”.⁴⁰ Jesus did not say “you shall love your enemy”, except by emphasising that by doing so, one becomes a son of the Father: “I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”⁴¹

Consequently, Jesus’ teaching cannot be considered separately from God. Since the existence of God is always real for Jesus, it is not possible to understand Jesus appropriately apart from God. Who, then, is the God to whom Jesus keeps returning? In terms of *Kwi-il*, the answer to this question cannot be given in philosophical terms, but in the qualitative terms of what Ryu understood of *Han’uhnim* as the Father of Jesus.

This makes clear that God is, above all, relational in Ryu’s theology, existing in relationship with human beings. Ryu emphasises that God is always connected with human beings through *Ŏl* even though humans live within a limited space and time. For this reason, human beings have the potentiality of fulfilling their humanity through realising their relationship with God, ‘returning’ to the eternal life from which they ‘originated’.⁴² As we have seen, Ryu symbolised this relationship in the ideogramme of *kŭt* (𠂔)⁴³ This demonstrates clearly the direct relationship between God and human beings, who belong to both heaven and earth and have their end in God. What is God like in terms of *Kwi-il*? Since Ryu puts emphasis on filial piety as the most typical feature of *Kwi-il*, it is reasonable to consider Ryu’s understanding of God through the concept of filial piety. As Jesus, in terms of *Kwi-il*, showed his devotion to God through filial piety, so through filial piety God shows Godself as

⁴⁰ Luke 10:27.

⁴¹ Matthew 5:44-45.

⁴² *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 39.

⁴³ This term is fully explained in Chapter 4.

‘Father’.

Ryu states that the most distinct aspect of the father is love. This is not an ordinary love but “love which pours forth as a torrent of lava”.⁴⁴ The metaphor of the erupting volcano throwing out torrents of lava offers a suggesting picture of the process of creation. God does not create out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) but, as it were, projects creation forth from within his own existence. Ryu understands this as an act of love:

The thing, which comes from God’s love, is heaven and earth. Based on God’s love, this universe comes into being. This love is not love between husband and wife, or brothers, or friends. This love cannot be described by word or thought. How can people participate in God’s love? Because people are sons of God, it is natural for sons to seek God who is the father.⁴⁵

God’s love as Ryu describes it is unconditional and universal. As a father’s love is given to children unconditionally, not because they deserve it or have a special claim, so is God’s love toward all human beings. It is this kind of love, creative and unlimited, that Jesus also puts into practice in relation to his neighbours throughout his life. Accordingly, Jesus awakens human beings to God’s love and brings them into actual loving relationships with God.

Ryu prefers to speak about God’s love in terms of its exemplification in the life of Jesus. The important thing to emphasise, however, in terms of God’s being the source of *Kwi-il*, is that the origin and destination of existence is conceived in terms of love (*agapē*). As Ryu tends to imply creation as a process of emanation from ‘the One’, it follows that all that emanates from God shares the quality of love that defines its source and destination. So creation, for Ryu, is a love-filled reality, and it is in this sense that he understands everything in creation to be turned toward God in love, as flowers naturally turn their faces toward the sun.

⁴⁴ *Tasōk-ōrok*, 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

E. Faith in the perspective of *Kwi-il*

The key spiritual and mental attribute for *Kwi-il* as 'returning to the God' is faith. Anticipating the distinction that Wilfred Cantwell Smith has elaborated, Ryu draws a clear distinction between faith and belief. Faith is the corollary of love and therefore is the way through which human beings can express their relationship with God. Time and again Ryu emphasises that faith must be sincere. Sincerity, not doctrinal content, is the hallmark of effective faith. Thus he could say: journey

If a person believes in Buddhism, he should not only call on the name of Buddha but also has to make desperate and continuous efforts to acknowledge Buddha's teachings. Therefore, whatever the factor is that causes us to be awakened, it is faith to hold that tightly to that factor, and to persevere with it until it is made real [in eternal life].⁴⁶

Although Ryu was naturally of a modest disposition even to the point of self-denigration, he was willing to speak of his own life of faith and to offer it as an example for his disciples. This is illustrated in the following quotation:

Even though others despise my faith, 'I' have to practice it. Nobody can practice faith in substitute of myself. 'Pray constantly' is nothing but pursuing faith alone as far as eternal life.⁴⁷

Ryu's own disciplines to ensure sincerity of faith were demanding. For instance he always sat on his knees except when sleeping or walking. Yi Söngdam made special note of this when discussing Ryu's attitude as prayer in his article in memory of Ryu: "Ryu's habit of sitting on his knees is a way of cutting the connections between the mind and human desires and thus of linking the mind to God."⁴⁸ Moreover, for almost forty years, Ryu ate only one meal a day, asserting that "this is the ultimate worship of God....[through which] the mind eats the body, and it is living by the sacrifice of my body".⁴⁹ For the same reason Ryu ceased having sexual relations

⁴⁶ Kim Hüngho, *Chesori* (제소리), 179.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Yi Söngdam, "Ryu Yöngmo üi sirch'önjökin yangsaeng (유영모의 실천적인 양생, Practical recuperations of Ryu Yöngmo), ed., Park Yönggho, *Tongbang üi Söngin*, 336.

⁴⁹ Kim Hüngho, *Chesori* (제소리), 217.

with his wife (*hoehon*, 회혼, meaning 'to cut off physical affairs').⁵⁰ Yi Sŏngdam offers these as examples of Ryu's daily practice of "filial piety to God the father".⁵¹ Faith, in Ryu's experience, can therefore be said to have been expressed in devotional piety, not in creedal beliefs.

Through this understanding of faith, Ryu practised the basic conviction underlying the practice of *Kwi-il* that since everything in creation comes from God and is returning to God, everything belongs to God, and nothing can be said to belong to human beings. He states:

For human beings, the most precious thing is life. But this isn't mine... time isn't mine either. Neither truth nor space are mine. Since there is nothing that I can do as I please, there is nothing that belongs to me. Every thing belongs to God.⁵²

For this reason Ryu turned his face from prosperity, honour, or power.⁵³ Rather, he sought to dedicate the whole of his life to keeping his faith in God sincere as the primary spiritual discipline of *Kwi-il*.

To this end, he devoted himself utterly to the example of Jesus as his master. Ryu described Jesus as '*uijung chi'in*' (의중지인), meaning 'a person of one's heart'. He wrote:

For me, there is the person who is located in my mind. The person who reproaches me to do well when I make a mistake is the person in my heart. It is Jesus Christ whom I can never forget. There is no one for me as master except Jesus. To know

⁵⁰ Park Yŏngho, *Tasok Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saengae wa Sasang*, vol.1, 334.

⁵¹ Yi Sŏngdam, "Ryu Yŏngmo ūi sirch'ŏnjŏkin yangsaeng (유영모의 실천적인 양생, Practical recuperations of Ryu Yongmo)", 345.

⁵² Kim Hŭngho, *Chesori* (제소리), 182.

⁵³ Yi Sŏngdam, "Ryu Yŏngmo ūi sirch'ŏnjŏkin yangsaeng (유영모의 실천적인 양생, Practical recuperations of Ryu Yongmo)", 333.

Jesus as a teacher is a different thing from believing in Jesus.⁵⁴

Jesus, therefore, is the perfect master in whom Ryu found encouragement to practice his faith continuously. This illustrates the quality of the master-disciple relationship that is part of sagehood in Confucian religious culture. This is the conceptual background of his commitment “continually and without hesitation to put the duties that the master requires into practice”, echoing the Confucian proverb to the effect that “the followers have to wait upon the master like heaven”.⁵⁵ On this basis, it is clear that Jesus, as the master, is the object of Ryu’s faith, and that Ryu understood this faith as obligating him to put Jesus’ mission into practice throughout his life. Ryu could thus state that he was never apart from the master as long as he lived, and that this is the way to believe in Jesus.⁵⁶ Thus, Christianity as religious faith means Christians modelling themselves on Jesus’ life as the means of ‘returning to the One’, the Father whom Jesus experienced as the Son.

It is clear, therefore, that Jesus remains at the centre of Christian faith in Ryu’s understanding, defined not in terms of doctrinal metaphysics, but in terms of piety and practical living. In this respect, moreover, Jesus can be understood as a person who reveals God’s love as it is. Therefore, Ryu concluded that nothing should be said of God that does not conform with the faith example of Jesus.

F. Conclusion

In this light, *Kwi-il* theology can be defined as the starting point as well as the goal of Ryu’s theology, as his way of holding God and human beings in dynamic relationship with each other. Without the theological insights of *Kwi-il*, Ryu’s theological understanding of God, Jesus, and Christ would be merely an exercise in metaphysics. As Ryu fully emphasises, the major task of Christianity is not simply to

⁵⁴ Kim Hŭngho, *Chesori* (제소리), 246.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

understand God, Jesus, and Christ but to put this understanding into action. As a result, Ryu's *Kwi-il* theology is a practical theology, based on the fundamental concept that theological understanding is concerned with 'orthopraxis' in the sense of finding the right way to put faith into practice.

The evidence of this chapter shows that *Kwi-il* represents a creative way of putting Christian faith into practice in the context of Korea. It responds to the traditional Buddhist and Confucian ways of understanding the purpose of life, and re-centres this around the person of Jesus who, through filial piety, reveals God to be a loving Father. This in turn enables Ryu to identify 'the One' – the source and destination of all existence – as Love, absolute, without limit or qualification. It is, therefore, of the nature of religion to express this love in cultivating the attitude of faith in the hearts and minds of its followers. In terms of religious pluralism, Ryu accepted that this is possible through Buddhism, Confucianism and, by extension, other religions. In terms of his own life, however, he sought to demonstrate that there is a particular significance in Jesus, whose practice of self-sacrifice gives deepest meaning to the process of *Kwi-il*, 'returning to the One'.

Part Three

Ryu Yōngmo and Contemporary Issues in Religious Pluralism

Chapter Seven. Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology in Relation to Contemporary Issues in Religious Pluralism

A. Introduction

Various interpretations of religious pluralism are possible. Nonetheless, it seems that those possible interpretations commonly take two main forms: 1) a factual approach, which indicates that heterogeneous religious groups have coexisted competitively in human society; and 2) an evaluative approach, which judges that the coexistence of diverse beliefs is desirable.¹ In particular, Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen distinguish between two kinds of religious pluralism: descriptive pluralism and normative pluralism.² The former depicts the reality that our human experiences are pluralistic. The latter accepts that a pluralistic situation is a good thing, even though each religious group has a different point of view.

The pluralistic situation in Korea, as examined in Chapter 1, shows that various religions have co-existed, while each has played a similarly influential role up to the present. On the one hand, this religious context of Korean pluralism has aspects of descriptive pluralism in external terms. On the other hand, it can easily be categorised as normative pluralism in internal terms. Nonetheless, it is not necessarily right to define the multi-faith situation in Korea as normative pluralism. This is because, in the context of cumulative religious traditions, not only do religious experiences differ from one Korean to another, but an individual Korean may have varied experiences. Thus, the previous categorisation of religious pluralism cannot give a satisfactory portrait of religion in Korea. Accordingly, religious pluralism itself cannot be explained and understood without considering local experiences. This is why local theology should be applied in Korea. The significance

¹ For details, see *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Harold Coward, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985). Coward employs 'religious pluralism' to emphasize the evaluative aspect rather than the factual aspect. On the other hand, Mouw and Griffioen explains religious pluralism by dividing it into two aspects.

² See Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralism & Horizons* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993).

of Ryu is that he attempted to develop a local theology in the context of religious pluralism. As discussed in Parts One and Two of this thesis, Ryu's life and religious experiences illustrate how, as a Korean Christian, he struggled to establish a local theology. His theological efforts reveal how a Korean Christian reinterpreted the main theological issues of Christianity in order to engage constructively with his local context of religious pluralism.

The history of religious pluralism in the West supports the distinction that has been made between descriptive and normative pluralism. The acceptance of religious pluralism emerged through the advent of modern science in the seventeenth century, with a consequent paradigm change from 'classical culture' to 'historical culture' based on the realisation of historical consciousness in the Enlightenment thought of the eighteenth century and nineteenth centuries.³ Classical culture held that European culture was the one general and normative culture, and maintained an absolutist concept of truth. Historical culture, on the other hand, is built on an awakening sense of the historic and cultural limitations of all epistemological and religious beliefs and a realisation that it is problematic and unfair to judge the truth of other religions on the basis of one's own religious culture.⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to bring the theology of Ryu Yŏngmo and his understanding of religious pluralism in the Korean context into critical dialogue with Western understandings of religious pluralism. This will be achieved by comparing Ryu's theological approach to religious pluralism with those of three Western scholars: John Hick, John B. Cobb and Paul F. Knitter. While these three theologians have each made substantial contributions to global discussions of religious pluralism, it should be recognised that each of them speaks out of a particular context. In this sense each has developed a local theology of religious pluralism, and it is this which makes it possible to compare their local theologies of religious pluralism with the

³ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), 31.

⁴ Paul F. Knitter, "Preface", *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ix.

local theology of Ryu Yŏngmo. Furthermore, these comparisons will throw additional light on aspects of Ryu's thought and help lead towards an objective assessment of his contribution to modern discussions of religious pluralism.

B. A Preparation for Dialogue: John Hick, John B. Cobb and Paul F. Knitter

Recent analysis of Western theological approaches to religious pluralism have produced various typological classifications. The typologies of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism were popularised in the 1980s. For purposes of the present discussion, a different way of classifying Christian theological approaches to other religions is preferred in the trilogy of Theocentrism, Christocentrism, and Soteriocentrism. These apply more accurately to the three Western theologians that will be examined, and are relevant ways to categorise elements of Ryu's theology as well.

It can be argued that these three approaches to religious pluralism are attempts to overcome the problems of exclusivism or inclusivism in Christianity. Exclusivism tends to be opposed to other religions, excluding them from the realm of divine activity and acting toward them on the basis of ethnocentrism.⁵ Inclusivism, on the other hand, admits that the knowledge and experience of the true God can be discovered in other religions, but that the fulfilment of such knowledge is possible only in relation to the person of Jesus Christ. This is a dialectical model that shows both an acceptance, and simultaneously a critique, of other religions' value, as well as an affirmation of Christ's finality.

⁵ Yi Wŏngyu, "Chonggyojŏk Paet'asŏng kwa Chonggyo ūi Kwangyee taehan Kyŏnghŏmjŏk Yŏngu, (종교적 배타성과 종교성의 관계에 대한 경험적 연구, An experimental study on relations between religious exclusivism and religious character)" in *Chonggyo Tawŏnjuŭi wa Chonggyo Yulli* (종교다원주의와 종교윤리, Religious Pluralism and Religious Ethics), ed., Seoul Taehakkyo Chonggyo Munje Yonguso, (Seoul: Chipmundang, 1994), 81; Kim Chich'ŏl, "Hanguk Munhwa Sinhake taehan Pip'an (한국문화 신학에 대한 비판, A Critic on Korean Cultural Theology)" in *Kiddokkyo Sasang*, Vol. 35 (1991. 12), 53.

Pluralism is a theological attempt to transcend the previous two standpoints. It accepts that all religions are valid ways of knowing God. It argues for a transformation of the way in which relations among religions are understood: a move away from the idea that one religion is true, to the idea that there is one truth to which all religions relate in different ways. This has been called a ‘Copernican turning-point’, likening the changes that are required in understanding of religions to Copernicus’ reconstruction of the way in which the universe is understood on the basis of the sun, not the earth, being at its centre.⁶ This revolutionary turning-point means breaking away from both exclusivism and inclusivism, and establishing a new conceptual universe of the relationship between religions and truth.⁷ In different ways the three Western theologians to be discussed in this chapter – John Hick, John B. Cobb, and Paul F. Knitter – are representatives of this pluralist position. As pluralist theologians, however, they each accept the possibility of salvation outside Christianity.⁸ Each does so on a different theological basis, however. In the following discussion it will be argued that Hick represents the Theocentric approach, Cobb the Christocentric approach, and Knitter the Soteriological approach.⁹

These distinctions offer grounds for comparison with the theological issues suggested by Ryu Yŏngmo. In Part Two of this thesis, Ryu’s theology was examined in three chapters that dealt respectively with his understanding of God (*Han’uhnim*), Christ as *Ŏl*, and *Kwi-il* as the process of salvation. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to compare Ryu’s understanding of these three dimensions with those of the selected Western theologians, since each of them deals with religious pluralism as the context of their local theology.

⁶ Hick declares this for the first time in his book, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973).

⁷ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name*, 147. In this research, the classification of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism follows Alan Race’s. See Alan Race, *Christian and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983).

⁸ Kim Chongsŏ, “Chonggyo tawŏnjuŭi wa Hanguk sinhakjŏk ŭimi (종교다원주의와 한국 신학적 의미), Religious Pluralism and the Meaning of Korean Theology)” in *Ch’angjo ŭi Pojŏn kwa Hanguk Sinhak* (창조의 보전과 한국신학, Preservation of Creation and Korean theology), ed., Hanguk Kiddokkyo Hakhoe, (서울: 대한 기독교 서회, 1992), 407-445.

⁹ Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, 25-45.

To compare Ryu's understanding of God as *Han'uhnim* with Hick's Theocentrism may reveal the strengths and weaknesses of their respective positions. It is also reasonable to investigate how Ryu's understanding of Christ, the so-called *Öl*, compares with Cobb's understanding of Christ. In addition, the perception of *Kwi-il* as Ryu's theological framework will be evaluated in comparison with Knitter's understanding of religious pluralism, which stresses salvation and the kingdom of God.

C. Dialogue 1: John Hick and Ryu Yöngmo – God and *Han'uhnim*

1. Hick as an example of Theocentrism

John Hick is among the Western theologians who have been most responsible for shifting the ground of theological discussion of religious pluralism from a Christ-centred model to one that places God at the centre. The term 'Theocentrism' can therefore be applied to his theology. Hick's thought not only includes other religions' experience and truth, going beyond Christ-centered exclusivism, but also establishes a common foundation for all religious experience. All religions are ways to God, or the Absolute, and on this basis Hick acknowledges the uniqueness and validity of all religions.¹⁰ He lays his emphasis on an ultimate transcendent reality, and thus escapes the limitations of exclusivism and inclusivism. He regards this turning-point for the establishment of religious pluralism as a 'Copernican revolution'.¹¹ He argues that a church-centred or Christ-centred theology is essentially exclusive in respect of other religions, and at best is able to recognise them as being anonymously Christian.

Therefore, contemporary religious pluralism requires a changed model of theological thought that affirms the diversity of religions from the standpoint of Theocentrism. In other words, all great world religions, including Christianity, are like satellites which revolve around the ultimate reality or God. The cosmos of belief is centred not on

¹⁰ See John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 5-6; John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 131.

¹¹ See John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 1-5.

Christianity or any other religion, but on God as the source of light and life.¹²

This Copernican revolution represents not only a new understanding of Christianity but also a new understanding of Christ. Hick employs Kantian epistemology in order to develop his understanding of God more clearly. This recognises a differentiation between ‘the thing in itself’ (*das Ding an sich*) and ‘the perception’ or mental image (*die Vorstellung*) of that thing; and between ‘the noumena’ and ‘the phenomena’. Applied to religion, Hick argues that all great religious traditions need to distinguish the ‘Real *an sich*’ from the reality as it is perceived through human experience and speculation.¹³ The difference between religions belongs to the realm of human perception and imagination. These differences are important and should be respected, but they do not entail the conclusion that the truth which they proclaim is subject to these differences as it exists in itself (*das Ding an sich*). Thus Hick writes:

In its Hindu form [there] is the distinction between *Nirguna* Brahman, i.e. the absolute Reality beyond the scope of human thought and language, and *Saguna* Brahman, i.e. Brahman humanly experienced as a personal God with describable characteristics. In Buddhism there is the distinction between the incarnate and the heavenly Buddhas (comparing the *Nirmanakaya* and the *Sambhogakaya*), and on the other hand the infinite and eternal *Dharmakaya* or cosmic-Buddha-nature. Again, the Taoist scriptures begin by saying that ‘the Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao’. Within Jewish mysticism (in the Zohar) there is the distinction between *En Soph*, as the infinite divine ground, and the God of the Bible; and within Muslim mysticism (for example, in Ibn Arabi) between *Al Haqq*, the Real, and our concrete conceptions of God. Likewise, the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart distinguished between the Godhead (*deitas*) and God (*deus*) in a way which closely parallels the *Nirguna-Saguna* polarity in Hindu thought. And in the present century Paul Tillich has spoken of ‘the God above the God of theism’.¹⁴

Hick believes that a single ‘divine noumenon’ the divine reality, the absolute, or the logos, exists behind all religions, and that diverse religions are based on humankind’s various religious responses towards this same reality. The different beliefs that mark

¹² John Hick, *God Has Many Names*, 52.

¹³ John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1985), 39.

¹⁴ John Hick, *The Second Christianity*, 82-83.

each religion have originated in different places and times within differing historical, cultural, or psychological situations. Hick refers to a famous Buddhist fable to express his theory. Those who touch different parts of an elephant all assert different things about what they feel. In the sense that they are all talking about an elephant, each is right. But insofar as each claim that the elephant is like the part they feel, they are wrong. In the same way each religion can experience the ultimate reality, and each experience is truthful, but its expression is partial, and therefore relative.¹⁵

On this basis, Hick re-examines the understanding of Christ. He does not accept that the doctrine of Jesus' divinity issuing from the Councils of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451) is the only interpretation of Jesus or that it is always a universally admitted interpretation.¹⁶ Rather, he claims that this doctrine is a by-product of a metaphysical understanding of reality and fails to satisfy contemporary demands for a dynamic understanding of Christ. Hick, accepting the findings of modern historical criticism of the Bible, argues that the Gospel of John, which had a decisive influence in establishing early Christology, can no longer be taken as incontrovertible historical evidence of what Jesus really said. It is doubtful whether terms for Jesus such as Messiah and the Son of God were ever used by Jesus himself, and they should be understood as faith expressions of the early Christian community after the resurrection event. Consequently, Hick believes that the needs, interests, and environment of the early Christian community were the foundation of the apotheosis of Jesus.¹⁷ Thus, the assertion of Jesus' finality is insupportable. Rather, Jesus should be understood as a human being who lived for God and who believed that salvation is achieved not by himself but by his heavenly Father. Thus, it is impossible to hold that 'Jesus is my Lord and Christ' in the literal meaning of the term, just as it would be meaningless to claim literally that "my lover is the most beautiful person in the

¹⁵ John Hick, "Religious Pluralism", in *The World's Religious Traditions*, ed. by Frank Whaling (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 159.

¹⁶ See John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 168.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

world”.¹⁸

Hick tries to surmount this defect by re-interpreting the Incarnation metaphorically. He rejects the traditional explanation of Incarnation in the substantial metaphysical terms of ‘substance’, ‘nature’ and ‘hypostasis’. In place of these, he prefers to speak of incarnation as the ‘purpose’, ‘action’ and ‘operation’ of process metaphysics. Hick regards the divine nature as the practice for *agapé*, and consequently the incarnation of God becomes an ‘inhistorization of *agapé*’.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the ‘inhistorization of *agapé*’ in Jesus cannot be identified with *agapé* itself. This is because Jesus’ incarnation and ‘inhistorization’ is not related to the whole created cosmos but is a concrete case of God’s *agapé* which is revealed in a human’s story and is active in a concrete human life. For Hick, Jesus has one nature – a human nature, so Jesus must be understood as a human. However, he believes it is the *agapé* of God that activates Jesus’ nature.

Hick’s claim that the true and essential features of Christianity should be found by re-interpreting traditional dogmas or faith is indeed a Copernican revolution. He asserts that Christian dogmas and faith are expressions of Christians’ religious experiences of God and Christ, but that these must not be equated with God *an sich*. So he prefers to interpret Christian dogmas and faith in ethical terms. To quote Hick: “religious or Theocentric experiences of God’s realities are the experience of ‘self-giving love’”. In addition, “Christianity is not centrally a set of beliefs or an ethic or a sacred scripture or an ecclesiastical organisation. It is a response of discipleship to Jesus of Nazareth; and these other things have come about as consequences of that response.”²⁰ In this light, for Hick, faith means to respond with full responsibility to

¹⁸ Krister Stendahl, “Notes for three bible studies”, ed. by G. H. Anderson and T. F. Stransky, *Christ’s Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), 7-18.

¹⁹ For Panikkar, Christ is not the historical Jesus but the cosmotheandric reality. Since Christ is actualised as theist Lord not only in Jesus but also in all possible representatives, it is wrong that incarnation is accomplished in Jesus theistically. Reimundo Panikkar, “Christianity and world religions”, *Christianity* (Patiala: India Punjabi University, 1969), 101.

²⁰ John Hick, *The Second Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 15. Similarly, Moltmann interprets the suffering of Jesus as the self-giving of God Himself. For details, see J. Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi: Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen* (München: Kaiser, 1989), 194.

the deeds and words of Jesus of Nazareth.

It is, finally, questionable whether the term Theocentrism rightly applies to Hick's philosophy, since he advances beyond the theistic view of God to speak in terms of 'reality-centredness' theology. Thus, Hick surmounts the limits of theological discourse which assumes a theistic point of reference. Furthermore, the ethical aspects of Hick's theology also help him transcend the ethnocentric tendencies of historic religions and posit a universal experience beyond Western Christianity.

On the basis of the foregoing analysis of the theology/philosophy of John Hick, it is clear that he belongs firmly to a Western, and particularly Kantian framework of thought. In this sense he is a local theologian, but one who tries to develop a way of thinking about religious pluralism that is of global relevance. At several points there appears to be a similarity between the thinking of John Hick and that of Ryu Yōngmo. Their contexts are very different, and this is reflected in their ways of thinking: Hick belongs to the tradition of Enlightenment that in its Western development gave primary epistemological significance to reason, whereas Ryu represents the classic Eastern experience of 'enlightenment' as the supra-rational awakening of the mind that he expressed in the term *Kkaedalūm*. The challenge in this chapter is to determine whether it is possible for these two ways of knowing and experiencing the divine can be brought into constructive dialogue with each other.

2. Dialogue between Ryu and Hick

According to Hick, human beings' religious experiences of God take two different forms: on the one hand, the dominant concept in solifidian religions sees God as a *persona*, while on the other hand, non-solifidian religions think of Reality as *impersona*. Hick claims to resolve the issue without neglecting the differences between these two experiences of God. To this end he embraces both theistic and non-theistic concepts and language in what he terms 'complementary pluralism'. This term stems from the principle of complementarity in modern physics, where

electromagnetic radiation, including light, is found to behave sometimes like waves and sometimes like particles.²¹ Therefore, Hick argues that the differences between the two experiences of the divine are caused by different ways of experiencing the reality. Hick states:

It seems to be the case that when humans ‘experiment’ with the Real in one kind of way – the way of theistic thought and worship – they find the Real to be personal and when other humans approach the Real in a different kind of way – the way for example of Buddhist or Hindu thought and meditation – they find the Real to be non-personal.²²

Hick’s opinion is an inductive conclusion after a wide-ranging examination of human beings’ religious experiences. This complementarity, that is to say, is connected with the fact that “the great world traditions are fundamentally alike in exhibiting a soteriological structure”.²³

This leads Hick to make an important shift – another cycle of the ‘Copernican revolution’ – to the concept of ‘Reality-centredness’ as his way of embracing the complementarity of theistic and non-theistic ways of experiencing and knowing the Absolute. This has two important gains for his argument. Firstly it affirms that the reality to which religious faith relates is the same, whether people affirm it in terms of a personal *theos* or in terms of an impersonal absolute that may even deny the concept of God at all. Secondly, it enables Hick to argue that insofar as religions seek to transform human life by moving away from self-centredness to Reality-centredness, they can all be accepted as offering ways of life aimed at salvation and liberation. In terms of his Christian faith, he claims that this argument is consistent with the New Testament perspective that “salvation/liberation occurs through a total self-giving in faith to God as he has revealed himself through Jesus Christ”.²⁴ In his further elaboration of this argument it is clear that Hick abandons dogmatic

²¹ John Hick, *The Second Christianity*, 85.

²² *Ibid.*, 85-86.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

understandings of the divine Reality and Reality-centredness in favour of moral and ethical perceptions. His understanding of God's reality is through the experience of God's 'self-giving love', and it is in emulation of this divine love that he encourages people of different religions to develop loving relations among their different traditions. It is clear from Hick's argument that, by employing scientific ideas, he seeks to break down the pre-modern Christian prejudices about the unique authority of Christianity, including its religious superiority, and uncritical presuppositions about other religious experiences. Hick tries to show that to believe in God and to describe the features of Christian faith through scientific consciousness is reasonable in terms of ethical rationality. Other religions constitute their religious experiences by responding to the worlds of the absolute and the transcendent, which they have known on the basis of their cultural and religious contexts.

The theological context of Ryu is obviously different from that of Hick. However, the theological significance of Ryu can be revealed by a dialogue with Hick. The discussion of Ryu's biography in Chapter 3 showed that Ryu's understanding of God developed through many stages as a result of his interactions with the several traditions of Korean religious pluralism, especially Buddhism and Confucianism. Ryu thus confirms from his own life experience the central thesis of Hick's argument, that religions comprehend God on the basis of their own religious experiences. Through his own experiential engagement with the other religions of Korea, Ryu moved from a traditional Christian understanding of God as expressed in the Korean term *Hananim* to a new understanding that embraced what Hick distinguishes as 'personal' and 'impersonal' concepts of the Absolute, and furthermore, harmonised the difference between Reality perceived as existence and non-existence. This transformation in Ryu's thinking about God is illustrated in his coining of the term *Han'uhnim*. In Chapter 4 emphasis was laid on the contextual reasons for Ryu's creation of this new term: these arose in part from his desire to harmonise the competitive concepts of *Hananim* and *Hanūnim* that divided Protestant and Catholic understandings of God, and perhaps in greater part from his desire to articulate a

Christian understanding of God that could relate to Buddhist and Confucian concepts of the Absolute. Considering his contribution in relation to Hick's Reality-centred interpretation of Theocentrism, it is clear that Ryu anticipated the inter-religious problem with which Hick is concerned, and offers a solution that harmonises theistic and non-theistic experiences of God.

It is useful, at this stage, to remind ourselves of the key elements of Ryu's understanding of *Han'uhnim*:

God exists without existence. Without being, God exists.²⁵

As our life becomes immeasurably wider, it reaches *Mu* (emptiness). So to speak, it reaches eternal life. This *Mu* (emptiness) is the beginning and the foundation of life, the basis of myriad things, and *Han'uhnim*.²⁶

Non-existence indicates something more immeasurably huge and complete; existence means fragmentary pieces; it is natural for there to be a large number if there are many fragmentary pieces from place to place; but *Mugŭk* (무극, 無極, the Ultimateless) and *T'aegŭk* (태극, 太極, the Supreme Ultimate) is the one and the uppermost.²⁷

Anything which has a great value cannot be owned. A large jewel is put in a bank. The bigger, the farther away. *Han'uhnim* seems to be a great distance away because *Han'uhnim* is so great. Yet *Han'uhnim* is ultimately myself. My real self. We know that *Han'uhnim* exists because I exist.²⁸

Han'uhnim exists everywhere. *Han'uhnim* lives eternally. *Han'uhnim* exists from beginning to end, forever, and remains unchanged. *Han'uhnim* eternally turns around, but remains materialised. Truly *Han'uhnim* is the basis of heaven and earth. We dare not limit Him. If confined by limits, can He be called the Way? If compelled to be named, is He the being who is so great and moves boundlessly? Does He exist far away, or near by? ²⁹


²⁵ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 371.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

²⁷ *Tasŏk-ilji*, Vol. 1, 637.

²⁸ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 269.

²⁹ Kim Hŭngho, *Ryu Yŏngmo Myŏngsangrok* Vol. 1 (유영모 명상록1, Ryu Yongmo's Meditations), 494.

Ryu's concept of *Han'uhnim* as Existence and Non-Existence serves to harmonise Buddhist, Confucian and Christian experiences of the 'One' (*Hana; il*) as the Absolute who is beyond name, but can be named – as the ideogramme  ('*uh*) is identical whichever way it is read. To arrive at this understanding Ryu had to move beyond traditional Western Christian understandings of God, and through intense reflection on Buddhist and Confucian concepts, he underwent the Copernican change that Hick calls for in his comprehension of divine. The shift from Theocentrism to reality-centredness is evident therefore in Ryu's understanding of God.

If this discussion has succeeded in demonstrating that Ryu's and Hick's understanding of God opens a new horizon, another question arises: how do they understand the significance of Jesus Christ? Hick maintains that the heart of Christianity is 'Jesus of Nazareth'. By thus identifying Jesus according to his name and place, Hick emphasises the humanity of Jesus and distinguishes Jesus and Christ. Thus he says:

The primary task of Christian communication is not to argue about theological ideas or about the inspiration of the Bible or the authority of the church, but to try to relay to others the impact of Jesus of Nazareth, thus making possible their own response of discipleship to him.³⁰

Therefore, it is Jesus of Nazareth who is the heart of Hick's Christology. In essence, Christianity and Christian discipleship are responses to the person of Jesus of Nazareth.³¹ Jesus' perfect devotion to God exemplifies the flawless Reality-centredness that challenges human beings, who live with absolute self-centredness, to re-orientate their lives. Therefore Hick argues that Jesus as the centre of Christianity represents not a metaphysical theory but an ethical and spiritual way of self-giving for others. To emulate this in one's own life is to experience the essence of Christian faith.

³⁰ John Hick, *The Second Christianity*, 15.

³¹ John Hick, *Christianity at the Centre* (1970, New York: Herder and Herder), 31.

The defining characteristic of Jesus is the quality of his obedience to the Transcendent – the God of *agapé* – through the practice of self-giving love. On this basis, Hick interprets the Christological titles as metaphors that express the faith experience of those who followed him.³² ‘Son of God’ therefore should be understood in terms of Jesus’ ethical conformity with God’s will, not as a reference to a supernatural relationship with God.

Hick is clearly not denying that Jesus had a sense of intimate relationship with God, his Father in heaven. In this sense he accepts that God was in Jesus. The significance of divine presence is better understood in terms of illustration than in terms of exclusive action. That is to say, the quality of Jesus’ life of obedience to God demonstrated how God is present universally in human experience, rather than limiting God’s presence to Jesus’ himself. In the light of this, Hick can affirm that Christian theology should expect to discover that the love of God, as illustrated in the self-giving love of Jesus, exists in the experiences of people of other faith traditions, and is in no sense confined to Christianity, least of all to Western Christian culture.³³

Ryu’s Christology, which was examined in Chapter 5 of this thesis, also distinguishes between the human Jesus and Christ. Even though there was never any actual and theological contact between Ryu and Hick, both focus on the primary meaning of Christ and take precautions against a possible confusion by using Jesus and Christ simultaneously.³⁴ Nevertheless, there is a difference between them, and that is the way in which they put Jesus at the centre of Christianity.

³² According to Hick, Jesus is named as ‘Lord’, ‘the Son of God’, ‘Messiah’, and furthermore ‘God’ by those who have experienced the transcendent love of God revealed in Jesus. See John Hick, *The Second Christianity*, 26-32.

³³ He takes as an example Gautama Siddhartha (Buddha), who is a historical person, the initiator of Buddhism, and becomes a divine character in Mahayana. He never insists that he is a god, but he is a person who achieves emancipation through surpassing the ego and becoming one with the ultimate transcendent reality. Later, Mahayana develops a doctrine of three gods on the basis of Gautama Siddhartha. As a result, the man Gautama Siddhartha is regarded as a transcendent and pre-existent *incarnatio* of Buddha, just as the man Jesus is understood as the *incarnatio* of logos or God. In the light of this, Hick considers that Buddha-logy and Christology have developed in an identical way. For details, see John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 168.

³⁴ For details of Ryu’s opinion of Christ, see *Tasök-ilji*, Vol.1, 518. For Hick’s understanding of Christ, see his book, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 5.

Hick puts the human Jesus at the centre of Christianity by arguing that the self-giving love that he demonstrated reveals the quality of divine love:

Jesus' loving concern for human beings was of the same quality as God's.... [It] might be said, Jesus' loving concern for people matched in its quality that of God himself. And so that Jesus' love is God's love incarnate would, on this view, not mean that Jesus' love *is* God's love but that it is *like* God's love and accordingly reveals to us the quality of the divine love.³⁵

In this sense, the identity between Jesus and God is of a qualitative kind. Hick continues:

Jesus' love was not merely *like* God's love; it actually *was* God's love expressed in the finite activity of a human personality. The identity in this case is that of a single activity which originates in one form and terminates in another. What is in its origin the divine grace towards man is in its incarnate form the activity of a human being, Jesus of Nazareth.³⁶

This emphasises the moral quality of God's attitudes and Jesus' attitudes to humankind as the link between them. In other words, Hick thinks that "God's will towards man is a loving will, and this loving will was expressed in the concrete spatio-temporal actions constituting the life of Jesus".³⁷ For Hick, the finite love of Jesus for his contemporaries was qualitatively one with God's infinite love for them. On the argument that the infinite is not excluded by the finite, he insists that it is not self-contradictory to say that the finite loving of Jesus of Nazareth is qualitatively identical with the infinite love of God for mankind. Jesus' life, accordingly, cannot help centring around the infinite loving of God, and Jesus' attitude of devoting his entire life to God is the moral principle that stands at the centre of Christianity. He states:

This is the way of complete trust in God, of loving concern for one's fellows, of non-violence, forgiveness, and a service to others which in Jesus' case

³⁵ John Hick, *Christianity at the Centre*, 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

consisted in a career of healing and teaching. It is because he not only taught this way of life, but lived it, incarnated it, that Jesus' memory, enshrined in the church, is alive and powerful today.³⁸

This argument is in many respect similar to that of Ryu Yŏngmo. The difference arises from his religio-cultural context which, as has been previously discussed, emphasises the moral and spiritual value of *hyo* (filial piety). This represents the moral ethic of the East Asian religion. In placing Jesus at the centre of Christianity, Ryu argued that he embodied the perfect practice of filial piety towards God.

As discussed in Chapter 5, Ryu described Jesus as a dutiful son who is devoted to the father God. This Jesus gives Ryu the power to accomplish full filial piety toward God, and thus Jesus becomes the master for others to follow.³⁹ In Ryu's thought, the relationship between Jesus and human beings is not one of saviour and sinners, but rather of master and disciples, the master inspiring those who follow him with the 'power of execution' of the moral power that he embodied. Ryu states that "acknowledging Jesus as the master differs from believing in him".⁴⁰ By this he means to distinguish between belief as an intellectual category that results in dogmas, and moral discipleship that is expressed through the activism of faith.

In Ryu's thought, Jesus lives a God-centred life based on perfect *hyo*. Jesus' moral practice gives Ryu the strength to achieve moral continuity himself, to understand and follow Jesus. On the basis of this experience, Ryu argued that moral practice is based on the relationship that God establishes with all human beings, as manifested in the moral example of Jesus. So far Ryu's approach is very similar to that of Hick. But whereas Hick posits the relationship between Jesus and God purely in moral terms, Ryu introduced the concept of *Ŏl* as the spiritual power that links God to humankind like a cord or rope.⁴¹ Thus, where Jesus is seen as fulfilling the highest

³⁸ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 150.

³⁹ Ryu Yŏngmo, "38 years later, when he had a calling, he entered the stage of faith", *Sŏngsŏ Chosŏn*, Feb. 1942.

⁴⁰ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 138.

⁴¹ See in Chapter 5.

qualities of filial piety, Ryu interpreted this as his awakening the *Öl* of God within him, and thereby becoming ever more intimately united with God. It is in this process, as we have seen, that Ryu identified Jesus with Christ, the term he used to denote the *Öl* that has been fully activated within the heart of a “son of the Father God”. This ensures that Ryu’s Christology is not confined to the moral level but advances towards that of religious faith. In this light, Ryu’s Christology is arguably a more genuinely Theocentric Christology than is that of Hick.

This view is confirmed when we come to assess Hick’s conclusion. Hick does not give a plain answer the question: “how are the characteristics of the Christian faith distinguished from other faiths?”. In his book, *The Myth of God Incarnate*,⁴² he fails to give a persuasive answer to the question of the distinctiveness of Christian faith. On the other hand, if Ryu had had to answer to this question, it is likely that he would have described the distinctiveness of Christian faith in the following manner: the duty of ceaseless practice, as demonstrated by his master, Jesus, is not only a moral foundation discovered in human experience but also a religious duty based on the spiritual (*Öl*) continuity between *Han’uhnim* and the human being who is dynamically orientated toward the One. It is the latter which gives this moral foundation an uninterrupted continuity that reaches to God.⁴³

It is the view of the present writer, therefore, that the dialogue between Hick and Ryu in the terms of their understanding of Jesus is instructive in two respects. Each agrees that Jesus was a human being in whom the moral potentiality of the human condition is perfectly fulfilled. Though neither accepts the doctrine of Jesus’ innate sinlessness, each holds that Jesus overcame sin by re-centring himself away from ‘self’ toward God. Each accepts that the New Testament language of divine sonship should be understood metaphorically, denoting a qualitative rather than supernatural

⁴² John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 163.

⁴³ Those who do not consider Confucianism as a religion accentuate the moral characteristics of Confucianism and usually misunderstand Confucianism in relation to cosmology. Confucianism in East Asia cannot be comprehended by separating ethics from religion, because it is fundamentally related to religious practice based on theocentric thought.

relationship between an obedient son and a loving father. Whereas Hick leaves the relationship at this moral level, however, Ryu elevates it to a spiritual plane by affirming that a real harmony of *Öl* existed between Jesus and God. This did not mean that Jesus had a unique relationship with God unlike that of other human beings. On the contrary, by maintaining that God's *Öl* is present in every part of nature and in every human being, Jesus as Christ – the fulfilment of *Öl* – is but one manifestation of the way of harmony with God, a guarantee of the actualisation of human unity with the One that others have and will experience in other ways. Ryu's affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth is also the Christ of God is not therefore a retreat into theological exclusivism, nor yet a concession to Christological inclusivism, but a contextually Christological way of embracing religious pluralism.

D. Dialogue 2: John B. Cobb and Ryu Yöngmo: Christ and *Öl*

1 . Christocentrism and Cobb

The above assessment of Ryu's theology through dialogical comparison with John Hick moves our discussion into a second dimension of Western theologies of religious pluralism that we have identified as Christocentrism. As an example of the Christocentric approach to religious pluralism, this section will consider the thought of John Cobb, with particular reference to his book, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*. In this work Cobb concludes that "our [i.e. Christian] mission is to display the universal meaning of Christ freed from our past compulsion to contradict the truths known in other traditions. Christ as Truth will transform the truths of all other traditions even as they transform ours."⁴⁴ His conclusion is closely connected with his personal experience of Christian mission, while in general terms he accepts a theocentric approach to the relationship between Christianity and other religions.⁴⁵ In terms of theological method, he is associated with process theology, which works on the premise that the nature of God

⁴⁴ John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 143.

⁴⁵ Cobb's missionary concern is linked to his background. Cobb was the son of a missionary, and he spent his childhood in Japan and served in broadcasting to Japan during World War II . Therefore, he had many chances to experience different cultures.

is not static, but is evolutionary in the sense that God is in process of development through God's relationship with creation, which is itself subject to ceaseless change.

Cobb asserts that "Christocentric pluralism is more fundamental pluralism than Theocentric pluralism".⁴⁶ He is critical of Theocentrism on the grounds that it has a hidden intention of incorporating all religions into a single ultimate reality which may not be explicitly identified as God, but substitutes another Absolute for God. Cobb seeks to avoid this problem, and does so by advocating a Christological pluralism on the basis of his process theology.⁴⁷

Cobb emphasises that Christ should remain at the heart of Christian theology. He maintains that it is important for a Christian to testify to Christ in dialogue with other religions. In his book *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, he understands the *Logos* as the existence of the universal presence of revelation and redemptive grace throughout creation, defining it as "the principle of creative transformation" in the world. Christ is a designation of *Logos*, as far as *Logos* itself is actually incarnated as historical forms.⁴⁸ Christ, he argues, is the realisation of universal incarnation as the Way that excludes no Ways. It is, therefore, not difficult for Cobb to discover Christ in all religions. In these terms, he argues that Christian theology should admit the truths present in other religions and should be willing to learn from them.⁴⁹ The *Logos* as the principle of creative transformation can transform every single thing creatively, but the *Logos* itself is not transformed. Christ as the incarnation of the *Logos* must therefore be understood to be intrinsically dynamic within the changing movements of creation and history, never being the same, always 'becoming' through the process of change, and therefore to be experienced and known in as many and various ways as there are people who encounter Christ as the *Logos*. On the basis of his process

⁴⁶ John B. Cobb, "Beyond 'Pluralism'", in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, ed. by Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), 81.

⁴⁷ Han Inch'ol, *Chonggyo tawonjuui wa shinhak ui mirae* (종교다원주의와 신학의 미래, Religious Pluralism and the Future of Theology) (Seoul: Chongro sŏjŏk, 1989), 228.

⁴⁸ John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

Christology, therefore, Cobb maintains that it is possible to affirm religious pluralism while remaining firmly committed to Christ. Cobb demonstrates how Jesus' very selfhood was constituted by the *Logos*, on the ground of the commentary evidence in the New Testament and the explanations of process theology. He asserts that the *Logos* is distinctively embodied in Jesus. Cobb concludes that Jesus is the full incarnation of the *Logos*, and a paradigm case of incarnation. This is to say that "this perfect incarnation of the *Logos* is at the same time the highest embodiment of humanity".⁵⁰ But because the Christ-*logos* is dynamically present in the constant transformations of creation and human societies, Cobb emphasises that there is no need to deny that what happened in Jesus has occurred in other persons. In other words, Christian theology should be disposed to the probability that persons like Jesus have existed in many times and places throughout human history. This is the meaning of Christ, Jesus being a normative example of how Christ is operative as a force of change within human experience.⁵¹

Cobb therefore distinguishes himself from the position to those Theocentrists who, he argues, have abandoned a Christocentric theology in order to advance in dialogue with other religions.⁵² Cobb claims that it is not necessary to hold back from Christ, because Christ is in process of being understood in new ways as people consciously encounter the *Logos* of God in the changing circumstances of life. Rather, he asserts emphatically that a true dialogue between religions can be achieved when Christians show the true meaning of Christ as the agent of change.

Why does Cobb emphasise Christocentrism? This question can be answered by exploring three main issues; revelation, salvation, and the methodology of dialogue. First, Cobb acknowledges that all religions have an ultimate meaning, and that this can be understood, in terms of Christian theology, as knowledge of God. But he dislikes using the term 'revelation' to denote this because, as a term of Christian

⁵⁰ John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 24, 100-110, 138-139, 171.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵² John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 70.

theology, it should not be applied to other religions. In particular, revelation as divided into two forms – general and special – implies a continuing sense of qualitative distinction between Christian and other revelations,⁵³ and this runs the danger of continuing a religious sense of superiority. However, from the perspective of his understanding of Christology, Cobb maintains that Christian theology must affirm the presence and knowledge of God in all religions.⁵⁴

Second, in terms of salvation, Cobb accepts that each religion has its own structure of salvation, and each religion gives its believers an experience of absolute meaning. In other words, there are many different methods of salvation, but it is wrong to say that there is a difference in the content of salvation. As with the term ‘revelation’, Cobb considers that it is improper to apply the term ‘salvation’ to non-Christian religions *en masse* because the term has a specific meaning and usage in the Christian tradition.

As regards the methodology of dialogue, Cobb does not present a common denominator for dialogue. He believes that there is an apparent distinction between Christianity and non-Christian religions and that this distinction is a source of dialogue between them. This is to say that the justification for dialogue arises from the differences between religions. However, he does not ignore the possibility that common elements may be discovered during the process of dialogue. But he emphasises that such common elements as may exist cannot be asserted *a priori* – i.e. as a basis and justification for the dialogue, but *a posteriori* – i.e. they can emerge only through the process of dialogue itself, to be affirmed as a result of, not in anticipation of, the dialogue. In other words, something that is discovered as being common to more than one religion is not fixed but a process: it emerges and develops within the framework of dialogue itself. Cobb sees the ultimate aim of dialogue in terms of ‘reciprocal reform’, which means the renovation and renewal of each religion through dialogue. As a consequence, reform is possible because of

⁵³ John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 70.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

differences, and differences between religions help each of them to learn and assimilate something new.⁵⁵

This understanding of dialogue gives practical expression to Cobb's concept of Christ who is always becoming, and whose ongoing incarnation of the *Logos* is always to be discovered anew in dialogue. Cobb argues that the problem of Christology in the context of religious pluralism is due only to the narrowness of the bounds in which Christian theology has traditionally understood Christ.⁵⁶

Consequently, Cobb maintains that a new understanding of Christology, based on the principles of process theology, makes it possible for Christians to dialogue with any religion in this world without retreating from the belief that God became/becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ.

Finally it should be recognised that Cobb's interest in dialogue is not confined to a search for mutual understanding, important as this clearly is. Process theology is essentially concerned with change and transformation. God and nature are in a constant process of change, and it is essential therefore that inter-religious dialogue should itself become a vehicle of religious change, not by one religion imposing itself on another, but through a process of 'reciprocal reform'. In these terms Cobb is particularly interested in the question of whether Christianity and Buddhism can move toward a common understanding of the transcendent reality as being both personal and non-personal at the same time. This, he suggests, could help Christians to develop a more accurate image of God than Theocentrism itself offers.

b. Dialogue between Ryu and Cobb

This raises the interesting possibility of constructive dialogue between John Cobb and Ryu Yŏngmo, particularly in relation to their respective understandings of Christ. It raises the question: is there a possibility of dialogue between Cobb's interpretation

⁵⁵ John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 70.

⁵⁶ Hong Jongsu, "Normativity of Jesus in Multi Religious Context", *Chonggyo shinhak yongu* (종교신학연구, Study of the Theology of Religions), No. 5 (1992, 4), 183.

of *Logos* Christology and what in Chapter 5, we identified as Ryu's *Ŏl* Christology?

In order to initiate a dialogue between Cobb and Ryu, it is necessary to explain more fully the way Cobb understands God from the perspective of process theology.

Process philosophers such as A. N. Whitehead have tried to surmount the substantial limitation of traditional theism by talking in terms of the 'dipolarity' of God.

According to the 'primordial nature' of God in process philosophy, God has an absoluteness that is independent of other existence; yet God exists in a relative reality due to God's 'consequent nature'.⁵⁷ This makes it possible to surpass the concept of God as 'the absolute other' and to surmount traditional characterisations of God such as unchangeable, self-existent, omnipotent, and so forth. Consequently the 'anthropomorphic' concept of God, which is actually influenced by human acts, can be meaningful in the present, mundane world.⁵⁸ God as the absolute other in classical supernaturalism is not only non-Biblical but also unacceptable to the modern mind. According to dipolar theory, God is absolute because only God is not dependent on others; on the other hand, the 'actuality' of God is a relative being, like human beings, and only God can have an impact on others and be influenced by them. Charles Hartshorne⁵⁹ tries to capture this in describing God as the 'self-surpassing Surpasser of all'. This dipolar God is absolute and relative simultaneously. Furthermore, God not only has an influence on all others, but is also changed, relative to human beings' real acts and determinations, though constantly "the fellow sufferer who...lures us on to the good", to quote the phrase of Whitehead. In this respect, only God is relative towards all others, and this elucidates pertinently the biblical insight of 'a loving and related God'.⁶⁰

The process theologians' emphasis on the bipolarity of God is comparable to Ryu's attempt to re-interpret God/*Han'uhnim* in terms of both existence and non-existence.

⁵⁷ A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 134.

⁵⁸ Park Chongch'ŏn, "Chonggyo Tawŏnjuŭi wa Sinhak ŭi T'alsŏguhwa, (종교다원주의와 신학의 탈서구화, Religious pluralism and De-westernization of Theology)", 146.

⁵⁹ Charles Hartshorne, *Natural Theology* (Illinois: The Open Court Publishing, 1973), 20.

⁶⁰ See D. Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (The Winston Seabury Press, 1975), 172-180.

It must be emphasised that bipolarity does not entail dichotomy: this is true of both the Western process theologians and Ryu, all of whom insist on holding together the bipolarity of God, or *Han'uhnim*'s existence and non-existence, as simultaneous or eternal. By extension of argument, they are all concerned to hold together the one and the many as differentiated realities, whereas Hick seems to move from the one to the many, and back from the many to one, in a manner that is difficult to distinguish from classical Neo-Platonism.

These two standpoints in Ryu's theology come into view clearly through the concepts of *Öl* and *Kwi-il*. First, *Öl* comes from 'the One', the all-inclusive Reality, as Ryu explains:

Öl flows out of God without Existence, and all things are full to the empty void. *Öl* is full to the empty void, God is impartial to all things.⁶¹

In Ryu's thinking *Kwi-il* represents the counter direction of *Öl*. In Chapter 6, which examined the concept of *Kwi-il*, it was discussed in term of a 'returning to the One', which complements the 'originating in the One' that defines *Öl*. Subject to the limitations of time, these may be seen as separate and consecutive movements, the 'originating' of *Öl* proceeding the 'returning' of *Kwi-il*. From the perspective of the One, however, they must be understood as synchronic movements, centrifugal and centripetal at the same time. It is in this sense that Ryu suggests that each is inborn in the human condition, and in the structure of nature itself. As Ryu often states, human beings cannot help returning toward God:

To return to God and complete God's word is the true way of unification and Heaven.⁶²

We human beings always miss Heaven, carrying Heaven on our heads, and longing for Heaven by reaching up to Heaven, because we come from God.

⁶¹ *Tasök-ilji*, Vol. 1, 812.

⁶² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1 55. 6. 2. Original text is as follows: 統一爲言人間，歸一成言天道誠，太初一命宗教義，咸有一德信仰城。

Kungsin (궁신, 窮神, 'longing for God') by which human beings seek God seems to be the nature of human beings, just as plants follow the sun.⁶³

Cobb's comprehension of Christ, as outlined earlier, is grounded in his understanding of God via process philosophy. *Logos* as the principle of creative transformation can be recognised through the perception of Christ, who can be found in all religions. In other words, Christ is a reference to the universal *Logos* that is active throughout all creation. Cobb states:

Christ is thus the immanence or incarnation of the *Logos* in the world of living things and especially of human beings. Since there is no sharp line between the living and the nonliving, there is no need to stress this limitation of creative transformation or Christ to the sphere of life....Christ means predominantly the immanence of the *Logos* in the living sphere, and it is especially among human beings that he is to be found.⁶⁴

Christ, thus, is the image of this *Logos*,⁶⁵ and Christ as God's *Logos* is constantly in process. Jesus normatively manifests the universal *Logos* in terms of love; but the *Logos* is in a constant process of evolving and can be manifested in other Jesus-type figures in this process. Jesus has normative, but not final, authority.

In Ryu's Christology the concept of *Öl* plays a role almost identical to that of the *Logos* of Cobb's Christology. Ryu states that the attributes of God, in qualitative terms, are bestowed identically on the *Öl*. If God is the tree, *Öl* is the seed of that tree.⁶⁶ Reciprocally, *Öl* is the original nature of God.⁶⁷ *Öl*, therefore, is qualitatively identical with God. The foundation for calling Jesus Christ is this concept of *Öl*. However, this *Öl* is given not to only Jesus but also to other human beings.

In Ryu's theology, *Öl* embraces the meaning of immanence of Spirit. In other words,

⁶³ *Tasök-örök*, 39.

⁶⁴ John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁶ *Tasök-örök*, 148.

⁶⁷ Park Yönggho, *Tasök Ryu Yöngmo ui Yugyosasang* (다석 류영모의 유교사상, Ryu Yöngmo's Confucian Thought), Vol. 1, 33.

Ryu maintains that *Öl* and Spirit are qualitatively identical. This raises the problem of the relationship between the Spirit and Christ. Cobb is aware of this problem and criticises Christian theology for some ambiguity in this regard: “unfortunately, the church has not established any clear connection between Spirit and another image [*Logos* and Christ], and the Spirit is regarded in Christianity as an eschatological phenomenon.”⁶⁸

In this light, Ryu’s *Öl* Christology offers a way of resolving this problem, a way that has affinities to process theology but has not been articulated by the process theologians. Key to Ryu’s understanding of *Öl* and *Kwi-il* is the notion that the *Öl* becomes Christ as the human being returns to God, abandoning self-centredness and becoming God-centred through a process of filial piety (*hyo*) of the quality that Jesus achieved as ‘Son of God’. In this way Jesus became Christ. Since Jesus was a human being, and not divine, it is possible for other human beings to achieve the same. Furthermore Ryu did not seek to establish objective or normative criteria for this process. Jesus actualised *Öl* and thereby became Christ, but in a demonstrative rather than an exclusive way: that is to say, he demonstrated that it is possible for other human beings. Ryu was emphatic that other religious figures, for example the Buddha or Confucius, achieved realisation of *Öl* in other ways of *Kwi-il*. The only criterion that Ryu seems to have offered is that of self-sacrifice. This was the climax of Jesus’ *Kwi-il*, and it was this that Ryu emphasised, rather than the life or teaching of Jesus. Thus, it seems fair to conclude that, in contrast to Cobb, who lays great emphasis on the normative significance of Jesus’ ‘lure’ to goodness, Ryu understood active human participation in the ‘returning’ movement of *Kwi-il*, ultimately through self-sacrifice, to be the way to true reality, in whatever specific form the *Kwi-il* might take.

Finally, there is the significance of locality in terms of the approach to dialogue between different religions. Cobb employs a scheme of ‘passing over’ and ‘coming

⁶⁸ John B. Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 261.

back' in order to dialogue with Buddhism.⁶⁹ This spatial metaphor is inevitable since, virtue of physical, cultural and religious identity, Cobb as a Western theologian had to establish contact with Buddhism by 'passing over' in order for the dialogue to begin. 'Coming back' then follows as the way of communicating between his own local religion and other religions. This chain of actions – crossing, learning for reciprocal reform, and returning again – implies an approach to inter-religious dialogue in which religions are understood as discreet 'reifications' of truth. For Ryu, no such view of dialogue was possible since, as was demonstrated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the experience of a Korean person is one of internalised religious pluralism.

E. Dialogue 3: Paul F. Knitter and Ryu Yŏngmo

1 . Soteriocentrism and Knitter

Paul F. Knitter, who at first had the very same outlook as John Hick, the Theocentric view, has developed an alternative expression of pluralism based on a salvation-centred, or Soteriocentric approach. The development of this position begins to be evident in his book, *No Other Name?* (1985), and is taken further in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (1987), which Knitter co-edited with Hick, and finds its most mature expression in *Jesus and the Other Names* (1996).

In his article "Toward a liberation theology of religions" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Knitter emphasises the necessity of Soteriocentric religious pluralism by establishing a connection between theology of religion and liberation theology. He warns that inter-religious dialogue is a luxury of the rich if it does not pay preferential attention to the eradication of poverty and suppression of political injustice in the world. He states:

In light of the present state of our world, therefore, both basic humanitarian concerns as well as the soteriologies of most religious world seem to dictate that a *preferential option for the poor and the nonperson* constitutes both the *necessity* and the *primary purpose* of interreligious dialogue. Religions must

⁶⁹ See chapter 4 and 5 in John B. Cobb's *Beyond Dialogue*.

speak and act together because only so can they make their crucially important contribution to removing the oppression that contaminates our globe. Dialogue, therefore, is not a luxury for the leisure classes of religion; nor is it a 'top priority' after we take care of the essentials. Interreligious dialogue is essential to international liberation.⁷⁰

Knitter, therefore, insists that Christians' attitude towards dialogue with other religions should develop a Soteriocentric approach.⁴¹ Encounters and dialogues between religious peoples in different religious traditions are not for disputing common ground, nor for praying and meditating together in order to clarify differences and similarities between, for example, the God of Christianity and the *Sunyata* of Buddhism. Prior to this, it is more urgent and necessary to act for the liberation of the oppressed. In other words, inter-religious dialogue should be committed to, and informed by, 'liberative praxis'. On this basis, it is possible to distinguish between right and wrong in religious practices or doctrines and to develop inter-communal agreement on how religions can co-operate for common justice.⁷¹

Knitter's distinction between a Soteriocentric approach and a Christocentric or Theocentric approach is an upshot of an apparent acknowledgement that no symbolic system is absolute, but all are relative to the mystery of salvation. He thinks that "the absolute, that which all else must serve and clarify, is not the church or Christ or even God – but rather, the Kingdom [of God] and its justice".⁷² Even though Christians are working for the Kingdom of God through Christ, Knitter requires, along with seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness, a more precise understanding of the Kingdom of God and Christ. The primary concern of Soteriocentric religious pluralism is not 'orthodoxy' based on the normativity of Christ, but 'orthopraxis' that contributes to the expansion of the Kingdom of God

⁷⁰ Paul F. Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions", in John Hick and P. F. Knitter, eds, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion* (New York: Orbis Book, 1987), 181.

⁷¹ Paul F. Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions", 187.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 190.

and its salvation by sharing in the struggle for justice with other religions.⁷³

Knitter's persistence is based on the certainty that the practices of liberation theology are the foundation and positive proof of religious theory or doctrine. Thus, all beliefs and truth of Christians should originate from these practices and be affirmed in the context of fresh experiences of the truth. In accordance with liberation theology, the truth is not theorised in order to be put into practice. Rather the truth is discovered, acknowledged and justified in liberative action and practice. If a person follows Jesus but does not put Jesus' teachings into action, he does not know who Jesus really is. Therefore, practice is the starting point and the basis of all Christology. This argues that no one is able to experience and affirm the normativity of Christ without first participating in the struggle that Jesus undertook to make the Kingdom of God real in his world.⁴⁴

The Soteriocentric approach of Knitter is gradually transformed by making the most of the strength of Hick's Theocentric approach and by accepting Cobb's critical call for a Christocentric approach.⁷⁴ However, Knitter's approach originates from local concerns in order to surmount many obstacles that Western theology is confronting. For Knitter, theological efforts for dialogue are not simply for the sake of revealing something new or for participating in the pleasure of religious conversations. Rather, it is because "the love of Christ constrains them" (2 Cor. 5:14) that theological works for dialogue between different regions should be performed. Knitter claims that theologians who attempt religious pluralism, including himself, wish to put Jesus' original teachings fully into practice. Jesus' teaching holds up love and unity as the hallmarks of the kingdom of justice. This is, according to Knitter, the meaning of salvation: if it is fully possible only in an eschatological dimension, the Bible does not ignore the historical aspect of salvation. Thus, Christian theologians, along with those of all other religions, need first to seek God's kingdom and justice, and in so

⁷³ Paul F. Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 65-67.

⁷⁴ This means criticism of Cobb's Christocentric approach. See Paul F. Knitter, "Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions", 187.

doing salvation is translated from doctrine into liberative ethical practice, and this opens up new possibilities for inter-religious ‘dia-praxis’.

2 . Dialogue between Ryu and Knitter

Knitter’s concept of Soteriocentric or Kingdom-centred dialogue has parallels with Ryu’s perception of *Kwi-il* which, as we have seen, is central to his theological framework. To bring Ryu into dialogue with Knitter, therefore, might serve to clarify the ideas of both theologians.

Knitter’s Soteriocentrism is based on Jesus’ Theocentric and salvation-centred world view. Thus he writes:

When we try to grasp the constellation of New Testament interpretations of Jesus, we find that they originated in a big-bang experience that transformed persons’ lives, an experience of what can be called salvation.... This experience of a saving power or revelation was the source and sustenance of all the interpretations of Jesus found in the New Testament.⁷⁵

As a possible foundation for his persistence, Knitter points this out in the Christologies of Paul:

He [Paul] was far more interested in soteriology than in Christology – more interested in spelling out the saving power of Jesus’ death and resurrection for humankind than in explaining who Jesus was or what he said. It might be said that what was important for Paul was Christ’s incarnation in Christians, not so much God’s incarnation in Christ.⁷⁶

This demonstrates not only that Jesus had a consistent concern for the Kingdom of God rather than himself, but also that Paul also had greater concern for Soteriology than for Christology. In this light, Knitter claims that the most important task in this world is not to pursue Christ or Christology but to establish the Kingdom of God and salvation of humankind.

⁷⁵ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 175.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

Knitter's emphasis on salvation can be compared with Ryu's stress on *Kwi-il*. Ryu regards *Kwi-il* as the goal of all religions. As discussed in Chapter 6, the term *Kwi-il* stems from Korean Buddhist and Confucian concepts, where it expresses the process of 'returning to the One'.

Ryu develops this concept in terms of the awakening of the *Öl* of *Han'uhnim* that subsists in all human beings. Interpreting Jesus as an example of a *Kwi-il*-centred life, Ryu sees him as awakening his *Öl* and living in accordance with original nature, resulting in his practice of *Kwi-il* in an exemplary fashion. He then applies this concept identically to all human beings. It is clear that the action of 'returning to the One' in Ryu's concept of *Kwi-il* corresponds to liberating practice in Knitter's perception of salvation. For Knitter it means "to put this kingdom [kingdom of God] in the centre of concern and to work toward building it".⁷⁷ He interprets the term 'the kingdom of God' in the inclusive sense of salvation as a historical and eschatological reality. Analogously, Ryu's *Kwi-il* is clarified in Jesus' perfect practice of the will of God in this life and, through his self-sacrificial death, into eternity.⁷⁸

Ryu does not use the language of liberation but of filial piety to characterise Jesus' *Kwi-il*. By this, however, he means more than a mere moral practice. Ryu emphasises that the Confucian understanding of filial piety as an ethic within the context of the family and by extension in society is itself insufficient: "true filial piety means to devote ourselves to God. We are unable to show filial piety to our physical father unless we devote ourselves to the father of heaven first."⁷⁹ Therefore, "the true object of *hyo* is God. Those who know God can devote themselves to the utmost filial piety".⁸⁰ But by strengthening the understanding of filial piety in this way, Ryu is always concerned to bring it back to human life, where filial piety acts as a means of transforming human relationships and therefore social structures and

⁷⁷ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 195.

⁷⁸ *Tasökö-örök*, 77.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

institutions. If Ryu does not develop the transformative social application of filial piety in specific terms, he sees it nonetheless as a basis for co-operation between religions in the common ethical practice of *Kwi-il*.

There is a second way in which Ryu's theology of *Kwi-il* and Knitter's Soteriocentrism complement one another in terms of their respective understandings of the uniqueness of Jesus. Knitter emphasises the 'relational uniqueness' of Jesus, meaning that Jesus had a unique relationship to God through being utterly centred upon God and the establishment of God's Kingdom. In a second sense, Jesus is unique in the faith affirmation of his followers, and in this sense he is not interchangeable with liberative figures in other religions. Uniqueness is, therefore, for Knitter a relational quality rather than an absolute reality.⁸¹ Jesus can therefore be compared with other liberative figures in other religions, all of whom are understood to be engaged in a common struggle for the Kingdom of God. But such comparison should be based on practice, since Knitter's prime concern is not the 'orthodoxy' for Jesus' normativity but 'orthopraxis' for expanding the Kingdom of God in active dialogue with other religions. Ryu adopts a similar position in emphasising, as has been shown in Chapter 5, that Jesus is not the only Christ. This is to recognise that other human beings, leaders of other religions, have the same capacity of actualising the *Öl* of God, and thus of becoming Christ figures. This does not mean that they become identical with Jesus of Nazareth. Ryu goes only so far as to suggest, on the basis of Jesus' example, that self-sacrifice is the essential element of *Kwi-il*, while recognising that this may take many different forms in particular religious and cultural contexts. Of both theologians, therefore, it can be said that they support a relational understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus and assess this by 'orthopractical' criteria rather than on the basis of dogmatic statements. This makes it possible for both theologians to welcome dialogue with other religions that seeks to redress problems of injustice and to extend the values of the Kingdom of God. Without insisting that Jesus is the final or normative *Logos* for all eras, they encourage

⁸¹ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 171-172.

Christians to be radical disciples of Jesus, practising his teaching and taking up missionary work in order to achieve the Kingdom of God with other religions. On this basis, Ryu and Knitter both advocate a practical approach to dialogue in a multi-faith context.

D. Conclusion

By comparing the theological approaches to religious pluralism represented by Ryu in comparison with John Hick, John Cobb, and Paul Knitter, it has been possible to look at Ryu's local theology in the broader global perspective of other local theologies. This enables us to draw three conclusions about Ryu's thought. Firstly, it has been demonstrated that his concept of *Han'uhnim* succeeds in harmonising the dimensions of divine existence and non-existence, being and non-being, within a real experience of theism which, arguably, Hick has abandoned in favour of a philosophical principle of the Absolute. Secondly, in relation to Cobb's Christocentrism, Ryu's *Ŏl* Christology seems to provide a more effective way of affirming the universal activity of God than does Cobb's *Logos*-centred Christology, which begs questions about the relationship between the *Logos* of God and the Spirit of God. At the same time, the process theology approach to Christology offers a helpful way of explaining Ryu's concept of Jesus becoming Christ through the actualisation and fulfillment of the *Ŏl* within him. Finally, Knitter's Soteriocentrism moves the discussion of religious pluralism into the realm of orthopraxis. This is a shift that Ryu also made through the development of his *Kwi-il* theology. While Ryu agrees in principle with Knitter's approach and offers a powerful interpretation of orthopraxis through the concept of filial piety, the liberative emphasis of Knitter's approach could provide an important stimulus to Ryu's disciples and others who are concerned to develop Ryu's theological legacy in new directions.

Chapter Eight. A Summary and Assessment of Ryu Yŏngmo's Theology

A. Introduction

The premise of this research has been that Christian theology should express itself locally, and that Christian theology, seen in a global perspective, comprises of multiple local theologies. This thesis has examined an example of a Korean local theology that addressed the multi-religious character of Korean society. In so doing it has identified in Ryu Yŏngmo a lively voice that has articulated a local Christian theology for a multi-religious situation that other Korean Christians might value and reflect upon.¹

When Roman Catholicism was introduced into Korea in the late eighteenth century, Korean Christianity was studied by Confucian intellectuals and interpreted on the basis of their Confucian ontology and concept of the deity. But Confucian interpretations of Christianity were rejected because of changes in the missionary policy of Roman Catholics at that time. As a result, the possibility of a local theology was nipped in the bud. When, in the late nineteenth century, conservative Protestant missionaries introduced Reformed Christianity, they also strongly prohibited local theology based on the local culture and religious traditions of Korea. It is against this background that Ryu Yŏngmo tried to re-interpret Christianity on the basis of his multi-religious context, without recourse to the missionaries' interpretations. This is what makes his inquiry into the nature of truth proclaimed by Christianity so valuable in Korean pluralist culture.

In this final chapter, an attempt will be made to summarise the legacy of Ryu Yŏngmo's theology and to assess critically his contribution to a 'local theology'.

¹ See Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 2.

B. Ryu Yŏngmo's Lived Experience of Religious Pluralism

Religious experience in Korea entails a total process in which there is no separation between the acquisition of religious knowledge through *Kkaedalŭm* (깨달음, Awakening), reflection upon this knowledge in the form of intellectual cognition, and the application of the resulting wisdom to one's life context. To be authentically Korean, local theology in Korea has to co-ordinate these characteristics of religious experience. In other words, local theology begins in the recognition that each religion has formed in a layered and cumulative structure historically and interacts ceaselessly with others. It is a misunderstanding of the multi-religious situation in Korea to isolate one religion from another and to treat them as distinct phenomena. Furthermore, religious knowledge in the context of religious pluralism requires that intellectual comprehension be based on intuitive apprehension of truth with all religious experience. Truth thus perceived needs continually to be put into religious practice. For this reason it is proper to say that religious experience in Korean culture is pragmatic in the twin senses that it is concerned with living, and therefore willing to integrate what is useful from local religious traditions.

It is this understanding of religious experience that is so well evidenced in the life and thought of Ryu Yŏngmo. He began from the foundations of *Mu* (shamanism), Buddhism, and Confucianism – the three religious traditions that together form the foundations of Korean culture. He encountered Western culture and Christianity in his experience as a young man (1905-1911). He soon felt alienated, however, from the Christianity introduced by Western missionaries, and set out on a quest for personal awakening to Christian truth within his continuing experience of religious pluralism (1912-1922). His theological itinerary continued until the moment of his death. His theological development enabled him to give an example of a proper theology for a local community. He reinterpreted the main elements of Christianity through local perspectives, employing local languages for theological terminology. With the empirical view of religious experience in Korea, Ryu's theological concepts like *Han'uhnim* and *Ŏl* flourished and refused to become theological dogmas, and

accordingly, the characteristics of Ryu's local theology were formed, based on *Kwi-il*, which is Ryu's theological framework.

Nevertheless, Ryu's theology, as a local theology, is not immune to criticism. The first point to be made in this regard is that his theology was personal more than it was public. Written in the form of diaries containing his meditations and poetry, it is intelligible only to a small group of disciples. Thus, there is limited public access to his theology, and this tendency weakens Ryu's theological influence, leaving him dependent on his interpreters. Secondly, Ryu's theology was non-systematic. While it could be argued that this corresponds with the experiential nature of his thought, it cannot be denied that it leaves his thought vulnerable to misunderstanding and makes it difficult to communicate in relation to systematic theologies of religious pluralism. This partly explains why, thirdly, his theology has been largely ignored by Korean churches. This is a common weakness of local theologies. In other words, in spite of the potential and challenges of local theologies, they are easily neglected by mainline churches. Ryu's theology, therefore, originating from the multi-religious context of Korea, illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of local theology.

C. Employing Korean Characters for Local Theology

The second valuable characteristic of Ryu's local theology is that it challenged the hegemony of Western terminology in Christian theological language by employing local Korean *hangŭl*. It is clearly to be seen in Ryu's writings that he succeeded in expressing meaningful theological interpretations of Christianity through Korean concepts and vocabulary rather than Western philosophical terms. In order to show that Christian theology does not necessarily have to be expressed only in Western languages, and that Christianity can be understood more clearly on the basis of local philosophy and metaphysical traditions – in this case, the various religious and philosophical traditions of Korea – Ryu borrowed religious terms from Korean indigenous religions and even coined new terms when appropriate indigenous terms

were lacking.² It would be misleading to interpret this merely as an attempt to synthesise Western and Korean terms. Ryu tried to establish a philosophical foundation on which to construct an indigenous expression of Christianity through local vocabulary. He claimed that “nothing has been achieved through a borrowed [language] up to now”.³ This is because “a single character contains a book of philosophy and everlasting truth is hidden in a single word”.⁴ To some extent, Ryu’s local theology employing Korean characters, *hangŭl*, might impress Korean theologians as being rather innovative, because the Korean theological world uses mainly Western languages. A contemporary Korean theologian, Ch’ae Suil, reflects in a similar way on the theological terminology of Korean theology, with the comment: “why is it this hard to understand theology? I gather it is because it is taught in a language that is difficult to understand.”⁵ Theology taught in a language that is beyond local understanding is artificial. Ryu Yŏngmo’s theological terms can help Koreans to overcome this obstacle and re-express Christian theological thought in local terms. Additionally, Ch’ae Suil points out that authenticity of theological language pre-supposes affective as well as linguist knowledge: i.e. one should have a religious ‘feel’ for the language in addition to technical command of its linguistic permutations. Ryu met both these criteria: his love of *hangŭl* led him to eulogise its qualities as a language of God with a depth that can convey the deepest of religious experience attained through awakening, or *Kkaedalŭm*; and he was particularly expert in his use of *hangŭl* ideogrammes as linguistic symbols that convey theological meaning. This enabled Ryu to transmit theological concepts in his own language based on local religious traditions, as well as his understanding of God through his *Kkaedalŭm* so that Koreans could have indigenous access to understanding Christianity.⁶

² See chapter 4, 5, 6.

³ Park, Yŏnggho, *Tasŏk Ryu Yŏngmo ūi Saengae wa sasang* (다석 류영모의 생애와 사상, Ryu Yŏngmo’s Life and Thought), Vol. 2, 132.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

Ryu replaced imported Western theological terms by Korean terms that were examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis. These were not Korean translations of Western terms and concepts. For example, the term *Han'uhnim* as the name of God reflects the worldview, cosmology and ontology of religious traditions in Korea. *Han'uhnim* is a well-developed word, for Ryu based it on the names of God that were already current in Korean theology, *Hananim* and *Hanūnim*. Arguing that neither of these terms fully expressed the concept of the One in relation to the diverse religious culture of Korea, he coined *Han'uhnim* in order to express the concept of God as the elevated king, as immense and infinite as the cosmos, identified with Heaven without any boundary above or below, whose ultimate existence was non-existence. To achieve this meaning, he skilfully introduced a new medial symbol, 'uh (으), that conveyed ideographically as well as semantically the fact that God's transcendence surpasses human comprehension. Thus Ryu's *Han'uhnim* symbolises the nature of God as Koreans experience it. In this case, employing Korean characters has the advantage of making it easier to understand God in the Korean context.

In similar fashion, Ryu used the term *Ŏl* to explain Christ and the Spirit at the same time. It is not a translated term. Rather, Ryu borrowed it from the Korean social context and re-interpreted it into a term of theological meaning. Initially, *Ŏl* indicated the social spirit of Korean culture, but Ryu transformed it into a theological term. He substituted *Ŏl* for *Sōngryōng*/Holy Spirit or *Yōng*/the Spirit as well as for *Kūrisūdo* (a transliteration of Christ). By using terms that were already familiar with the Korean social context, he succeeded in expressing Christian concepts in ways that made them intelligible in Korean culture.

The third characteristic term in Ryu's theology, *Kwi-il*, was borrowed directly from the religious vocabulary of Korean Buddhism and Confucianism. *Kwi-il* in Buddhist and Confucian thought denotes a process of harmonisation and integration, and in Ryu's theology it is adapted to express the synthesis of his experience, thought and

religious practice in the process of 'returning to the One'. In other words, Ryu extended its meaning into the context of religious pluralism, and employed it for the enrichment of his work on local theology.

Ryu's pioneering use of Korean characters required wide-ranging knowledge of various subjects, including the Korean language, and could not be achieved without consistent academic work. The fact that many Korean theologians have recently begun to recognise Ryu's thought is closely connected with a flourishing of interest in ways in which the Korean language can be developed. It can be said that Ryu contributed greatly to instating the Korean vernacular as a legitimate linguistic vehicle for the expression of Christian thought. There can be no doubt that Ryu pioneered the use of *hangŭl* in relation to Christian theology, thus setting a linguistic precedent for expressing local theology in the language of the people.

On the one hand, by employing local terms, Ryu was able to play a constructive role in harmonising religious concepts within Christianity and among the different religious traditions of Korean culture. Ryu's critics have argued that this is both a superficial exercise and one that presumes to re-caste Christianity in syncretistic form. In examining his use of these new terms, this thesis has tried to show that Ryu remains faithful to the core issues of Christianity. He insisted, however, that it is inadequate simply to translate these core concepts into Korean equivalents: this is what the missionaries had tried to do and in Ryu's judgement had failed. He therefore attempted to plant the seeds of Christianity in the soil of Korean culture in the belief that a flower would grow that is authentically Korean and authentically Christian. On the other hand, local language has limitations in terms of communication between different local theologies. While the strength of local theology is that it uses local concepts and local languages in the interest of local people, this can be an impediment to communication or interaction with Christian theologies in other localities. The more unique local terms are employed, the greater will be the limitations in communicating with each other. In Chapter 7 of this thesis,

therefore, an attempt was made to bring the basic elements of Ryu's local theology into dialogue with representative Western theologians dealing with issues of religious pluralism. Through such dialogue – which of course did not take place in Ryu's own life – it was demonstrated that it is possible to bring Ryu's concepts into creative discussion with Western theological ideas in a process of mutual enrichment.

D. Ryu Yŏngmo's Understanding of God as Existence and Non-Existence

Ryu's third contribution was to seek an integration of Western and Eastern understanding of God's nature by interpreting it on the basis of local terms and religious background. As Ryu struggled to find an adequate way of naming God in the Korean language, he realised the inadequacies of the Western understanding of God, and so he proceeded to build up a theological concept of God which complements the Western understanding. Ryu once remarked that, "Westerners do not know what 'non-existence (*Mu* / nothingness / fullness)' is⁷. The concept of 'existence' is well understood in the West, but 'non-existence' eludes Western understanding."⁸ Ryu does not mean that there is no concept of 'non-existence' in the West, but that it is truly hard for Westerners to understand the concept in anything other than negative ways. According to Western thinking, if God is Existence, non-existence must be the opposite of God; if God's Existence is good, non-existence can be applied only to the moral evil that has ultimately no reality in relation to God. Ryu devoted much of his intellectual energy to correcting this negative definition of non-existence through a radical re-interpretation of the Christian understanding of God in terms both of Existence and Non-Existence, and to this end he drew especially creatively on the traditions of Buddhist thought in Korea.

This thesis has argued that Ryu's perception of 'Non-Existence' as the nature of God,

⁷ Remember that this differs from *Mu* (Shamanism) even though the pronunciation is identical.

⁸ *Tasŏk-ŏrok*, 309.

far from excluding the perception of 'Existence', incorporates it in such a way as to overcome the finitude of Existence. Ryu's concepts of 'Non-Existence' and 'Existence' are always dealt with simultaneously, so neither one is emphasised at the expense of the other. For Ryu, 'Non-Existence' is not simply nothingness or emptiness, but fullness: "*Mu* (Non-Existence) indicates that which is immeasurably huge and complete."⁹ This shows that it was Ryu's firm intention to reject the idea that 'Non-Existence' had anything to do with the so-called 'death' of God. Rather, it was to free God from all limitation, even of the limitation that is implied in conceiving of God as 'the first cause' or 'the perfect substance'. God's reality is most fully expressed in terms of God's Non-Existence. Ryu's attempt to express such thinking about the nature of God was aided by his use of the concept of *Hana*, which is drawn from Eastern cosmology and ontology. As seen in Chapter 4, Ryu integrated the core of Eastern thought in his Christian theology. He re-interpreted Chou Tun-yi's (1017-1073) phrase "the Ultimateless (*wu chi*)! And yet also the Supreme Ultimate (*t'ai chi*)!"¹⁰ to mean that "*T'aegŭk* (*t'ai chi*, the absolute in terms of Existence) and *Mugŭk* (*wu chi*, the absolute in terms of Non-Existence) are *Hana* (One), and *Hana* is God." In terms of East Asian cosmology, *Mugŭk* and *T'aegŭk* are related to each other in time and space, and thus, they are inseparable. *T'aegŭk* as Existence cannot exist without *Mugŭk* as Non-Existence, and the Non-Existence of *Mugŭk* can be explained only in relation to the Existence of *T'aegŭk*. Therefore, the idea of a finitude limited by Existence can be transcended by the infinitude of Non-Existence. Ryu thus preserved finitude and infinitude simultaneously in his understanding of God.

Ryu's understanding of God is arguably his most significant contribution to a local Christian theology in the Korean context, and illustrates how he sought to re-interpret the legacy of the Western missionaries through engagement with local Korean perspectives. It also illustrates how a particular local theology can make a valuable

⁹ *Tasŏk-ilji*, vol. 1, 637.

¹⁰ Fung Yu-lan, trans. by Derek Bodde, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 435-437.

contribution to theology in other parts of the world. As most Western theology has only been able to comprehend Non-Existence only in negative terms, Ryu offers a positive understanding of 'Non-Existence' that not only breaks out of the Western framework of understanding, but also can help Western theology to create a bridge with Eastern philosophy. This cannot be the case for every local theology, but it implies that varieties of theology might be an advantage rather than an obstacle when it comes to solving the theological problems of Christianity in global terms.

E. Ryu's Understanding of the relationship between Jesus and Christ

The fourth area of Ryu's theology that has drawn the attention of this thesis is his Christology, and specifically the very important question of the relationship between Jesus and 'the Christ'. Traditional *Logos* Christology attaches much weight to explaining Christology in terms of divinity being incarnated in Jesus.¹¹ Ryu's *Öl* Christology lays its emphasis, rather, upon concrete features of the human Jesus, who puts God's *Öl* or Spirit into human action.

The traditional Western Christian doctrine of Jesus Christ being truly divine and truly human, articulated in the Nicæan creed and the Chalcedonian definition of Christology, did not satisfy Ryu's perception of Jesus: he criticised it for being incomprehensible to the Korean mind, relying on a mystical resolution of a kind that was alien to Korean and his own spiritual experience. He therefore proposed an alternative way of comprehending the relationship between the human and the divine in the person of Jesus, based on the local Korean concept of *Öl*. This was thoroughly examined in Chapter 5, where *Öl* as 'spirit' was explained as a divine gift that is bestowed equally on all human beings. It was present in the life of Jesus in an exemplary way – intensively, absorbingly, in a manner that led to its total integration with his humanity, which resulted in his humanity itself being fulfilled through transformation as Jesus 'returned to the One' (*Kwi-il*). This was elemental in Ryu's understanding of Christ, Spirit, and Holy Spirit. In other words, the two natures of

¹¹ Nikos A. Nissiotis, "Pneumatological christology as a presupposition of ecclesiology," *Oecumenica* 2 (1967), 240.

Jesus, represented as Jesus (his humanity) and Christ (his humanity fulfilled in relation to the One), are comprehended organically in the concept of *Öl*. By this means Ryu was able to affirm the reality of Jesus' humanity as being that of every human being, while at the same time endorsing Jesus as being fully human by virtue of being wholly integrated with God's *Öl*. The difference between Jesus and other human beings, however, relates to the degree in which he was obedient to God, not in his nature. While Jesus represents an '*Öl*-filled' humanity, which is a humanity transformed through intimacy of relationship with God, he remains fully a human being whom it is possible for other human beings to follow and emulate, since all human beings are like Jesus in his humanity and all human beings enjoy the divine gift of *Öl* in their own lives. 'Jesus is a human' is therefore the maxim that lies at the heart of Ryu's Christology. This is not intended to diminish Jesus in any respect; on the contrary, it means that Jesus represents the fullness of humanity. At the same time, it avoids exclusivising the divine-human relationship in Jesus by putting him into a unique category of God-man and therefore separating him from the dimension of human experience.

Ryu believes that the only object of proclamation is God, not the human Jesus. This does not imply, however, that he excluded the transcendent dimension of Christology. For Ryu, "Christ is Holy Spirit originated from the eternal life."¹² Thus, Ryu's Christ is the *Öl* – the Spirit as the life of God – given to Jesus as well as to all humankind. In other words, if the *Öl* of Jesus is Christ, then the *Öl* of human beings is also Christ. In this light, *Öl* is the key concept in Ryu's Christology, connecting God, Jesus, and human beings with each other, and clarifying the unity between Jesus Christ and God on the one hand, and between Jesus Christ and human beings on the other.

From Ryu's Christology it is reasonable to conclude that he saw Jesus in terms of the sage. This is a clear illustration of his 'localising' of Jesus in the Korean cultural

¹² *Tasök-örok*, 344

context, or of ‘incarnating’ Jesus’ humanity with the intellectual and moral qualities as traditionally understood in Korean religions. The sage represents the idealisation of humanity while remaining a human being. In other words, the sage is one who realises human potentialities through inner self-cultivation, rather than receiving additional qualities of divinity from a source outside himself. This is achieved through awakening or enlightenment. Using this concept of sagehood, Ryu pressed the argument that Jesus extends the Confucian understanding of the sage to include moral and spiritual harmony with God. For this he used the concept of filial piety (*hyo*), and by this means he grounded Jesus in the highest ethical practice of Confucianism. At the same time, however, he applied the Confucian understanding of father-son relationship to Jesus’ relationship with God. It was in this sense that he interpreted the significance of Jesus as ‘Son of God’, and of his being ‘one with the Father.’ These and other New Testament terms he interpreted in terms of a moral and spiritual relationship, rather than in terms of supernatural metaphysic concerning the nature of Jesus.

F. The Balance of Theory and Practice in Theology

The ethico-spiritual emphasis of Ryu Yŏngmo’s *Ŏl* Christology brings us to the final contribution that he made to local theology in Korea: namely the balance between theory and practice, which means that theology is something that is ‘done’ through praxis, more than it is speculated in theory. Throughout his life Ryu tried to put his faith in God into action, and his writings illustrate how he translated his *Kkaedalŭm* (깨달음, 覺) into a practice of living faith. This is the concept of *Kwi-il* that was investigated in Chapter 6. Ryu proposed this *Kwi-il* theology not as a new theological system but as a living practice. The importance of Ryu’s biography, outlined in Chapter 3, is that it illustrates how he practised *Kwi-il* theology all his life, demanding consistent practices and cultivation of himself and encouraging other people, especially his disciples, to develop their own ways of self-cultivation.

Kwi-il is, firstly, an internalised, intrinsic and universal disposition within human beings. Ryu says that “*Kwi-il* is a human nature that calms a human’s deepest mind

like plants' heliotropism".¹³ This may be compared with Rudolf Otto's 'numinous feeling'¹⁴ or F. Schleiermacher's 'feeling of absolute dependence',¹⁵ although Ryu regarded this as natural to the human condition, not something that was confined only to the religiously conscious person. Following the metaphor of the flower that naturally turns to the sun for light, Ryu understood human nature to be disposed toward God and in a natural path of *Kwi-il* or 'returning to the God.'¹⁶

Secondly, this natural disposition of *Kwi-il*, bestowed on all human beings, means that all have the potential of transcending time and space.¹⁷ The religious task of all human beings, therefore, is to realise this potential by activating it through enlightenment and self-cultivation. Ryu accepts without question that history offers many eminent examples of people who have achieved this realisation in relation to 'the One'. The distinctive quality of Jesus lies in his life of complete self-renunciation that culminated in his death on the cross, his ultimate act of self-sacrifice in obedience to God. The reason why Ryu accepted Jesus as his master was that Jesus did not simply teach self-sacrifice, but showed what it means as a way of living. It was in this practice of *Kwi-il* that Jesus manifested himself as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (John 14:6). It follows, therefore, that, *Kwi-il* requires a response from one's whole personality, and it affects the relationships between oneself, one's neighbours, and the cosmos. *Kwi-il*, as a consequence, cannot be separate from human life and is to be practised without end.

Kwi-il therefore represents the essence of Ryu's theology. In this light, for Ryu, theology is not an academic sympathy, but an enlightenment of a human's intrinsic disposition that results in a new way of living. In this respect Ryu shows that theology expands it into experience and activism, and brings two dimensions –

¹³ *Tasök-örok*, 39

¹⁴ See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of The Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950)

¹⁵ See F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by John Oman (New York: Harper and Row Publisher, 1958)

¹⁶ *Tasök-ilji*, vol. 1, 369.

¹⁷ *Tasök-örok*, 241.

theory and practice – into a complementary relationship.

G. The Significance of Ryu's Theology for Current Christian Understanding of Religious Pluralism

One outcome of Ryu's attempt to develop a local theology is the possibility of resolving theological problems that have arisen in other local contexts. This thesis has been particularly concerned with questions facing Christian theologies of religion through the twentieth century experience of Christians encountering people of other religions in the process of inter-religious dialogue. By virtue of the fact that Ryu Yŏngmo's local theology was developed in a multi-religious situation, this thesis has suggested that it might have a valuable contribution to make to discussions about religious pluralism in other parts of the world.

1. Overcoming an Exclusive Attitude

Since those who live in a multi-religious context usually internalise the multi-religious structure, an exclusive attitude seems mostly to originate from extrinsic influences. In the context of Korean Christians, the exclusive attitude toward other religions is principally a legacy of Western, and particularly Protestant missionary Christianity.

In this thesis, discussion has focussed on three aspects of religious pluralism: the Theocentrism, Christocentrism, and Soteriocentrism. They were identified with the thought of John Hick, John Cobb, and Paul Knitter respectively. All three approaches start from a basic recognition of the need to surmount the exclusivist understanding of Christianity that maintains that Truth exists only in the terms of Christian proclamation. At the same time, the discussion of their views in Chapter 7 showed that each has his own way of overcoming this problem. Ryu's theology is concerned to achieve the same goal, but his method is different.

This difference derives from Ryu's experiential context. This thesis has argued that

religious pluralism in Korea is more than a social phenomenon: it defines the very character of Korean culture and is the existential reality for all Korean people. To be religious means, by definition, to experience religious pluralism within oneself.

Therefore, since the multi-religious situation is embodied in Ryu, to think in terms of theological exclusivism would be to deny his own identity. This, he argues, is what most of the Western missionaries required, even if they did so inadvertently; and to the degree that they succeeded, they made it impossible for Christianity to take root in the religiously-plural experience of Korean culture. To reverse this, and to affirm his own identity, Ryu embraced religious pluralism as the context of his local theology. Herein lies the difference between his approach and that of Western theologians. As the latter addressed problems of religious pluralism that lay outside the traditions of Christian theology, Ryu sought to construct a Christian theology from within the social context and personal experience of religious pluralism itself. Thus, the so-called ‘Copernican Revolution’ that John Hick calls for is the natural context of Ryu’s theology. It may be that Western Christians have something to learn from Ryu’s approach, given the fact that religious pluralism is now becoming an indigenous reality within Western societies.

2. An integrated View of God

In relation to current theological issues in religious pluralism, another significant aspect of Ryu’s theology is his understanding of God. As scrutinised in Chapters 4 and 7, his understanding of God can be characterised as a balance between God as Existence and Non-Existence, both of which are integrated in his understanding of *Han’uhnim*. Western theology has tended to be based on a positivist understanding of God’s existence in theistic terms, and this presents obvious problems when Western theology comes into dialogue with, for example, Buddhist concepts of *nirvana*. To the degree that Ryu succeeded in integrating Buddhist and Western concepts of non-existence and existence in relation to ‘the One’ (*Hana*), it can be said that he has made a valuable contribution not only to Christian theology in his local context, but to global discussion about Christian understandings of God in

relation to the challenges of religious pluralism. In other words, Ryu's understanding of God overcomes some of the problems inherent in Western discussion of Theocentrism, evidenced by Hick, Cobb, or Knitter, and unfolds an integrated understanding of God that includes an understanding of Eastern religions: God as 'Non-Existence'. Against this background, however, Ryu offers his Buddhist and Confucian counterparts an understanding of the Existence of God that is faithful to the Biblical witness to God as Love, establishing a personal relationship between God as Father and human beings as God's sons, yet he does through the use of metaphoric language that avoids anthropomorphising God.

In addition, Ryu's understanding of God provides a vision of local theology which, by giving priority to orthopraxis over orthodoxy, does not become tied down or limited by theological concepts. In this respect Ryu anticipated Knitter's argument, reviewed in Chapter 7, that theology needs a paradigm shift from theoretical discussion of Theocentrism to a soteriological view of the Kingdom of God.

3. The Possibility of Metaphoric Language as Theological Language

Another significant feature of Ryu's local theology in the context of religious pluralism is his use of metaphor. Ryu's theological language consists of poetic diction, employing metaphors without restraint. This has sometimes led to confusion among his critics who have misinterpreted his particular meanings in their attempt to generalise his concepts. The point of metaphor, however, is that it is not intended to convey literal meaning, but serves to suggest meaning, appealing to the imagination of the reader or listener. It is in this sense that Ryu's theology can properly be described as an 'aesthetic' construct, in which symbol and ideogram are important ways of communicating meaning. This has traditionally been a feature of Korean religious expression, evidenced in the wealth of metaphor in the Korean Buddhist and Confucian traditions, and is an essential prerequisite for an authentically local Christian theology as well.

The same applies to the language in which discussion between religions takes place. If religious pluralism accepts metaphorical language more broadly than prose style, it can be more easily and properly understood. There is little evidence of this, however, in the writing of the Western theologians that have been examined, all of whom give priority to rational argument. This makes it very difficult for people who have been cultivated in Eastern cultures to be convinced by their views: the appeal to the mind need to be complemented by appeal to the heart, and the ability of an idea to evoke affective response is an essential means of justifying that idea. In order to have a more dynamic dialogue between local theologies, Ryu shows that there is much to be gained through the effective use of metaphor. This is particularly true for dialogues between religions in East Asia and Christian theologies based in that context, because the religious language of East Asian religions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, is essentially metaphorical.

Ryu's use of metaphorical terms as theological language is significant, therefore, as a means of showing how theological language can be developed in the context of religious pluralism. To comprehend other religions means to understand their religious sentiments. In order to do this, it is best not to seek the exact meaning of each word and phrase itself, but to understand the symbolic meaning of religious statements, and to see how they constitute affective as well as effective expressions of faith.

Conclusion

In offering an analysis of the theology of Ryu Yŏngmo, this thesis hopes to have made an original contribution to the study of Korean local theology. Ryu Yŏngmo was not the only person to attempt to develop a local Christian theology in Korean history, but he is the most significant person to have attempted to do so in the twentieth century. In recent years his theology has become the centre of debate among Korean Christian intellectuals who are beginning to acknowledge that the health of Christianity in Korea should not be measured only, or even primarily, in terms of church growth. While this remains the mindset of most of the church institutions, intellectuals are arguing that the future of Christian faith in Korea requires that the foundational concepts on which it is built need to be re-interpreted in authentically Korean terms. This has resulted in a renewed interest in Ryu Yŏngmo's writings, and there are signs that scholars are beginning to be interested in his thought.

Although Ryu's disciples have been prolific in publishing the writings of their master, none have yet attempted to interpret Ryu's thinking in systematic form. This is something that has been attempted for the first time in this thesis. In doing so, the researcher is aware of the problems that confront such a task. Ryu was not a systematic theologian himself: he did not think systematically, and his writings reflect the highly personal character of his thinking. It is important, nonetheless, to attempt to give a systematic account of Ryu's theology. The present writer does not claim to offer the final word on Ryu's theology, but believes that it has been rewarding as well as worthwhile to draw out the coherence of the main elements of Ryu's thought.

If this thesis succeeds in providing a point of reference for scholarship on Ryu's theology, it does not make any claim to offering a final word. On the contrary, it must be recognised in this Conclusion that there are several areas in which research

on Ryu's thought needs to be taken further. Four areas merit brief elaboration.

The first recognises the importance of Ryu's disciples. It is fair to say that Ryu was a teacher more than a writer. This thesis has shown that he spent much of his adult life in company with a community of thinkers, meeting regularly at the YMCA in Seoul. Some of these became his disciples, adopting his religious ideas as their own and modelling their lives on his religious practice. He also referred to them frequently in his diaries, where he 'counted their days' as an expression of his spiritual concern for them. Several of these disciples have been mentioned in this study, mainly in terms of their editions of Ryu's writings which provide an indispensable source for knowledge about their master. But the present research has not attempted to include them as research subjects in their own right. To study the theological contribution of the disciples would be valuable in three important respects. Firstly, it would show the degree of influence that Ryu had on their thinking and provide a measure for assessing the effect of Ryu's practical instructions on their individual and collective way of life. Secondly, it would reveal ways in which Ryu's disciples may have elaborated and extended his thought, possibly in new directions that respond to the developing situation of Korean society and culture. Thirdly, it would be a way of examining how local theology remains alive within the context of a changing community. It has been one of the arguments of this thesis that local theology is dynamic in character: it is not bound by tradition and seeks to be responsive to local contexts, which are themselves never static. Therefore local theology has always to be evolving, and it is through Ryu's disciples that this growth can be measured and assessed.

A second area for further research would be to examine Ryu's thought from the religious perspectives of Buddhism and Confucianism. Elemental to his own local theology was his attempt to interpret Christian beliefs in relation to philosophical and religious concepts in the other religious traditions of Korea. While this thesis has tried to identify and discuss the mainly Buddhist and Confucian concepts in which

Ryu was interested, no attempt has been made to evaluate Ryu's integration of Buddhist, Confucian and Christian ideas from the perspective of Buddhism or Confucianism. There is evidence that in recent times some Buddhist and Confucian scholars in Korea have begun to notice Ryu's work, and this promises to provide a creative new dimension to the study of Ryu's theology.

A third area of research arises from a question that continues to puzzle the present writer: namely, Ryu's ambiguous attitude towards social and political activism. The discussion of his life history in Chapter 3 shows that in early adulthood Ryu clearly identified himself as a Korean nationalist. It was through nationalism that he first became attracted to Christianity, and his early reading of the Bible was in the context of the trauma of Korean national humiliation at the hands of Japanese imperialism. It also seems clear, however, that as he became ever more deeply involved in the study of religions and theology, he became progressively less active in social and political terms. His fascination with *Öl* and *Kwi-il* was never world denying, but it concentrated his attention on *Hana* as the source of 'the myriad things', perhaps at the expense of his involvement in social life itself. At the same time it must be recognised that some of his disciples continued to be involved in social and political activism. This was especially true of Ham Sökhön who was one of the leaders of the democratisation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and who received national and international recognition by being twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ham died in the late 1980s, and until his death he continued to show respect for Ryu Yöngmo. So the interesting question arises: in what ways may Ryu's thought be seen to comprise implications for social and political activism? A study of the social and political roles of Ryu's disciples would be an important way of answering this question.

Finally, this thesis has attempted to offer an analysis of a local theology rooted in the religious and cultural traditions of Korean society. One of the questions that arise with any local theology is how it relates to theology in other contexts. Local theology

does not accept that there is a meta-theology, or a grand theology that comes from one place and can be applied to all other places. This is a hierarchical model of theology that has been rejected by new forms of theology emerging in different parts of the world, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. Local theology insists that theology springs from the life of people, and that people form particular communities and cultures which will give local theology particular characteristics. The question then arises: how does local theology avoid the danger of parochialism? How does it avoid the danger of the faith that it seeks to articulate being trapped and possibly distorted within the confinements of a particular culture? An obvious way out of this danger is to bring local theologies into dialogue with one another, so that together they can become 'mutually self-critical', to borrow a term from Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

It is important, therefore, that future research on the local theology of Ryu Yŏngmo should develop a comparative frame of reference with local theology in other parts of Asia. In view of the importance of religious pluralism as the context for Ryu's theology, it would be especially relevant to compare his theology with local theologies in South and Southeast Asia, where Christians are equally faced by situations of religious pluralism.

Glossary

<i>ae</i> 애 (愛, love)	records of one's descent group)
<i>ae</i> 애 (哀, sorrow)	<i>Chōldaemu</i> 절대무 (絶對無, Absolute Nothingness)
<i>Atbum</i> (the higher self)	<i>Chōngjuhak</i> 정주학 (程朱學, Cheng-chu School)
<i>Avatamsaka-sutra</i> (화엄경, 華嚴經, Voluminous Mahayana Buddhist text)	Chosŏn 조선 (朝鮮, 1392-1910)
<i>Bodhisattva</i> 보살 (菩薩, Buddhas-to-be)	<i>Chosŏn Yesugyo jangrohoe chonghoe</i> 조선 예수교 장로회 총회
Ch'oi Namsŏn 최남선 (崔南善, 1890-1957)	Chou Tun-yi 주렴계 (周濂溪, 1017-1073)
<i>Ch'ŏn-Chu</i> 천주 (天主, Lord of Heaven)	<i>Chu-chae</i> 주재 (主宰)
<i>Ch'ŏn Myōng</i> 천명 (天命)	<i>Chu-Yōk</i> 주역 (周易, Book of Changes)
Ch'ŏndogyo 천도교 (天道教, founded by Ch'oi Cheu in 1859)	Chu Hsi 주희 (朱熹, 1130-1200)
<i>Ch'ōngch'un</i> 청춘	Chu Munmo 주문모 (周文謨, ?~1801)
<i>Ch'ŏnjamun</i> 천자문 (千字文, the Thousand Chinese Character Text)	Chuang-tzu 장자 (莊子, ?-?)
Ch'ŏnjinam Chuōsa 천진암 주어사	<i>chungin</i> 중인 (中人, people who acted as links between the ruling <i>yangban</i> and the common people and were sometimes related to <i>yangban</i> through secondary marriages)
<i>Ch'ŏnju Konggyōngga</i> 천주공경가 (天主恭敬歌, a Poem of Reverence for God)	<i>Chungyong</i> 중용 (中庸, the Doctrine of the Mean)
<i>Ch'ŏnmin</i> 천민 (賤民, a parish class)	<i>dana</i> 보시 (布施, generosity)
<i>Ch'iljōng</i> 칠정 (七情, The Seven Feelings: <i>hui</i> , <i>no</i> , <i>ae</i> , <i>ku</i> , <i>ae</i> , <i>o</i> and <i>yok</i>)	Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate 태극도설 (太極圖說)
<i>chesa</i> 제사 (祭祀, the ancestor memorial worship),	<i>gut</i> 굿 (exorcism)
<i>chi</i> 지 (智, wisdom)	Ham Sōkhōn 함석헌(1901-1989)
<i>chin-sim</i> 진심 (眞心, whole heart or sincerity)	<i>Ha'naunim</i> 하느님 (God)
Chinul 지눌 (1153-1210)	<i>Haedong so</i> 해동소 (Korean Commentary)
<i>chokpo</i> 족보 (族譜, genealogical	

Han'uhnim 한웅님 (God)

Han'uim 한우힘 (God)

Han'unim 한우님 (God)

hana 하나 (the One)

Hananim 하나님 (God)

Hangŭl 한글 (Korean character)

hanŭl 하늘 (heaven)

Hanŭnim 하느님 (God)

Hanyang 한양 (漢陽, now Seoul)

Hasudong 하수동

Hauna 하나 (one)

Hyesim 혜심 (1178-1234)

Hinayana (the means of salvation restricted to a smaller number of people)

hoehon 회혼 (cut off physical affairs)

hokwŏn hoksaeng 흑원흑생
(或原或生, [huo-yuan huo-sheng], some originate and some beget)

hui 희 (喜, joy)

Hunminjŏum 훈민정음 (訓民正音)

Hwajaeng 화쟁 (和諍, Reconciliation of Doctrinal Controversy)

Hwang 황 (皇, a noble and lofty being like a king)

hyo 효 (孝, filial piety)

i 이 (理 [li], the Principle)

i/ki ilwŏnron 이기일원론
(埋氣一元論, i/ki monism)

i/ki iwŏnron 이기이원론 (理氣二元論, i/ki dualism)

i/ki, 이/기 (ontological concepts)

Il 일 (一, One)

Imjin Oeran 임진왜란 (壬辰倭亂, the Japanese invasion of Korea from 1492 to 1598)

in 인 (仁, humanity)

K'ŭm 쿼 (the unlimited cosmos)

kaehap 개합 (unfold and seal)

kak 각 (覺, awakening)

Kaon-tchiggi 가온찍기

ki 기 (氣 [chi], Material Force)

Kil Sŏnju 길선주 (1869-1935)

killye 길례 (吉禮, congratulatory ceremony)

Kim Chaejun 김재준 (1901-1990)

Kim Kyosin 김교신 (1901-1945)

King Chadae 차대왕 (次大王, A.D. 71-165)

King Sunjo 선조 (宣祖, 1790-1834)

King Ŭija 의자왕 (義慈王, ?-?)

Kisinron 기신론 (起信論)

kiyŏk 기억

Kkaedalŭm 깨달음 (覺, Awakening)

kŏkyŏng 거경 (居敬, Adhering to Seriousness)

Kol 골 (valley)

kong 공 (空, Emptiness)

Kongdong Pŏnyŏk 공동번역

Koryŏ 고려 (高麗, 918-1392, name of Korea)

Ksanti 지계 (持戒, perseverance)

ku 구 (懼, fear)

Kungsin 궁신 (窮神, longing for

God)

kunja 군자 (君子, a person of virtue)

kunli 궁리 (窮理, Investigating)

kūt 굿

Kwanhon Sangje 관혼상제 (冠婚喪祭, the Four Ceremonies; coming-of-age, marriage, funerals, and ancestor memorials)

Kwi-il 귀일 (歸一, returning to One)

Kwi-il sim-wōn 귀일심원 (歸一心原, to return to the origin of one mind)

Kwi 귀 (歸, return)

Kwōn Sangyōn 권상연 (權尙然, ?-?)

Kyesajon 계사전 (繫辭傳 [Xici Zuan], Commentary on the Appended Phrases)

Kyojong 교종 (敎宗, non-Zen Buddhism)

Kyōngse-Ch'iyong 경세치용 (經世致用, administration and practical usage)

Lao-tzu 노자 (老子, 604?-531? B.C.)

Li T'ung hsün 李通玄 (635-730)

Maengja 맹자 (孟子, Mencius)

Mal 말 (horse)

Mal 말 (word)

minjung 민중 (民衆)

mu 무 (無, Nothingness)

Mu 무 (巫, shamanism)

Mugŭk 무극 (無極, the ultimateless)

Musok 무속 (巫俗, shamanism)

Myōnghak 명학 (明學, Ming School)

niŭn 니은

no 노 (怒, anger)

o 오 (惡, hatred)

Ōbsigyesin-im 없이계신 임 (Im who is Existing without Being)

Ōlgul 얼굴 (face)

Ongo chisin 온고지신 (溫故知新 reviewing the old and learning the new)

Osan school 오산학교

P'algwanhoe 팔관회 (八關會, Assembly of Eight Prohibitions)

P'ungryu 풍류 (風流, tasteful or refined)

Pada 바다 (sea)

Paejae Haktang 배재학당 (培材學堂)

Paekje 백제

Park Hyōngryong 박형룡 (1897-1978)

p'i-da 피다 (bloom)

p'i 피 (blood)

Prajñaparamita Sutra

반야바라밀다심경 (the essence of *Prajñaparamita* [Perfection of Wisdom] writings)

prajña 지혜 (智慧, wisdom)

Puja yuch'in 부자유친 (父子有親 there should be affection between father and son /the way of filial piety)

Pulsōng 불성 (佛性, Buddha-dhatu or Gotra)

Pyōngja Horan 병자호란 (丙子胡亂, the Manchurian Incursion of 1963)

Revised Hangŭl Bible 개역 한글판

sadan 사단 (四端, The Four Beginnings: *in, ŭi, ye, chi*)

Saddharmapundarika sutra 법화경 (法華經)

Saem 샘 (a fountain)

Saemunan church 새문안 교회 (the first organised Presbyterian Church in Korea)

Samgan Oryun 삼강오륜 (三綱五倫, the Three Cardinal Virtues and Five Ethics)

Samguk 삼국 (Three Kingdoms, 3rd century B.C. – A.D. 668)

Sang-Che 상제 (上帝, [Shang ti])

Sang-Chu 상주 (上主)

sangmin 상민 (commoners)

Sarvastivāda (Doctrine That All Is Real)

silā 인욕 (忍辱, morality)

Silsa-Gusi 실사구시 (實事求是, seeking truth grounded on concrete evidence)

Simhak 심학 (心學, School of Mind)

Sin Yuhak 신유학 (新儒學, Neo-Confucianism)

sirhak 실학 (實學, practical learning)

Six Paramita 육바라밀 (六波羅蜜, six virtues)

Sōdang 서당 (書堂), a sort of private primary school

Sōng 성 (性, Nature)

Sōng 성 (誠, sincerity, the Truth)

Sōnggyo yoji 성교요지 (聖敎要旨, The Purport of Sacred Religion)

Sōnglihak 성리학 (性理學, Sung philosophy)

Sōngsō Chosōn 성서조선

Sōnjong 선종 (禪宗, the Zen sect of Buddhism)

sosang 소상 (小祥, the first anniversary of the death of a person)

Sukahavativyuha 무량수경 (無量壽經)

Sung dynasty 송 (宋, 906-1279)

Sūngdong Church 승동교회 (a Methodist church)

Sunyata 공 (空, Emptiness)

Syang-Tye 양테

t'ae 태 (太, big)

T'aegŭk-tosŏl 태극도설 (太極圖說, Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained)

T'aegŭk 태극 (太極, the Supreme Ultimate)

T'ien-ti 천지 (天地, Heaven and Earth)

T'ong Pulgyo 통불교 (a synthetic Buddhism)

T'oigye Yi Hwang 퇴계 이황 (退溪 李滉, 1501-1570)

Taehan Cheguk 대한제국 (大韓帝國, Oct. 1897 - Aug. 1910)

taesang 대상 (大祥, the second anniversary of a death)

Tao-te ching 도덕경 (道德經)

Tasŏk-ilji 다석일지 (多夕日誌, Ryu's Diary)

Tasŏk-ŏrok 다석어록 (多夕語錄,

Analects of Ryu)

The Book of Changes 역경 (易經),

The Book of History 서경 (書經)

The Three Classics 삼경 (三經)

to 도 (道, the Way)

Tojǒng Pigyŏl 토정비결 (make a prediction of coming events depending on a person's trigrams)

tongch'uliimyǒng 동출이이명
(同出而異名)

Tongmong sŏnsŭp 동몽선습
(童蒙先習, a basic learning text for children)

U-ju 우주 (宇宙, Cosmos)

Uchimura Kanzo (1861-1930)

ŭi 의 (義, righteousness)

Ŭich'ŏn 의천 (1055-1101)

ŭijung chiin 의중지인 (意中之人, a person of one's heart)

Ŭisang 의상 (625-702)

Unified Silla 통일신라 (57 B.C. – A.D. 935)

Vimalakirti-nirdesasutra 유마경
(維摩經)

virya-paramita 선정 (禪定, vigor)

Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529)

Wŏnch'ŭk 원측 (542-640)

Wŏnhyo 원효 (617-686)

Wŏnsan Haksa 원산학사 (元山學士)

yangban 양반 (兩班, civil or military elites by the beginning of the Yi dynasty)

ye 예 (禮, propriety)

Yi Pyŏk 이벽 (李蘖, 1754-1786)

Yi Sangje 이상제 (1850-1927)

Yi Sujŏng 이수정 (1842-1886)

Yi Sŭnghun 이승훈 (李昇薰, 1864-1930)

Yiyong-Husaeng 이용후생
(利用厚生, technological and economic reform)

yok 욕 (欲, desire)

yŏkhaeng 역행 (力行, Strenuous efforts)

Yŏndong church 연동교회 (a Presbyterian church)

yŏngyŏng group 연경반 (a Bible study group)

Yukwanghak 육왕학 (陸王學, Lu Wang School)

Yulgok Yi I 율곡 이이 (栗谷 李珣, 1536-1584)

Yun Chich'ung 윤지충 (尹持忠)

kaon 가온 (筭)

Saenuri 새누리 (Korean newspaper)

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